NEW

PHARAOHS

UNEARTH THE SECRETS, SACRIFICES AND SARCOPHAGI OF ANCIENT EGYPT'S MYSTERIOUS RULERS

FROM THE MAKERS OF ALL ABOUT HISTORY

Digital Edition

FUTURE

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WAR & CONQUEST ▲ ANCIENT TOMBS ▲ RELICS & RUINS

Welcome to PHARAOHS

When we think of Ancient Egypt, an array of images spring to mind: pyramids, mummies, hieroglyphics, sacred animals, the Nile and much more. But at the centre of this iconic civilisation were its people; in particular its monarchs. Ancient Egypt spanned more than 2,000 years and was ruled by approximately 170 pharaohs. Believed to be the mediator between the gods and the world of men, the pharaoh would pass on his sacred powers to the new pharaoh after death, and would become divine. But what was everyday life like for these all-powerful rulers? What responsibilities did they have, and how did religion and politics both unite and divide a nation? From the dynasties of the Old Kingdom to the rise and fall of individual leaders, delve into the extraordinary world of these fascinating beings, unearthing the secrets, sacrifices and sarcophagi of Ancient Egypt's mysterious rulers.

FUTURE

PHARAOHS

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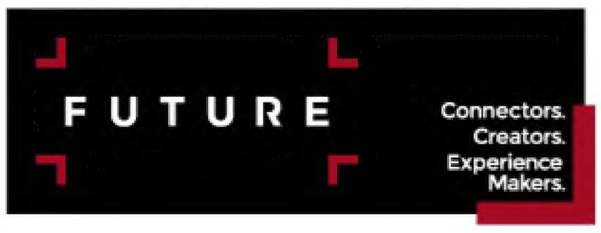

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MEDITERRANEAN SEA
GIZA
HELIOPOLIS
MEMPHIS
TURAH
LOWER EGYPT
SAKKARA
HERMOPOLIS

Map of Ancient Egypt

From the Nile Delta to the fertile floodplains, explore the setting that became the birthplace of a great civilisation

ABYDOS

DENDERA

VALLEY OF THE KINGS

THEBES

EDFU

ASWAN

NUBIA

ABU SIMBEL

UPPER EGYPT

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BIRTH *of the* PHARAOHS

12 *Narmer: father of Egypt*

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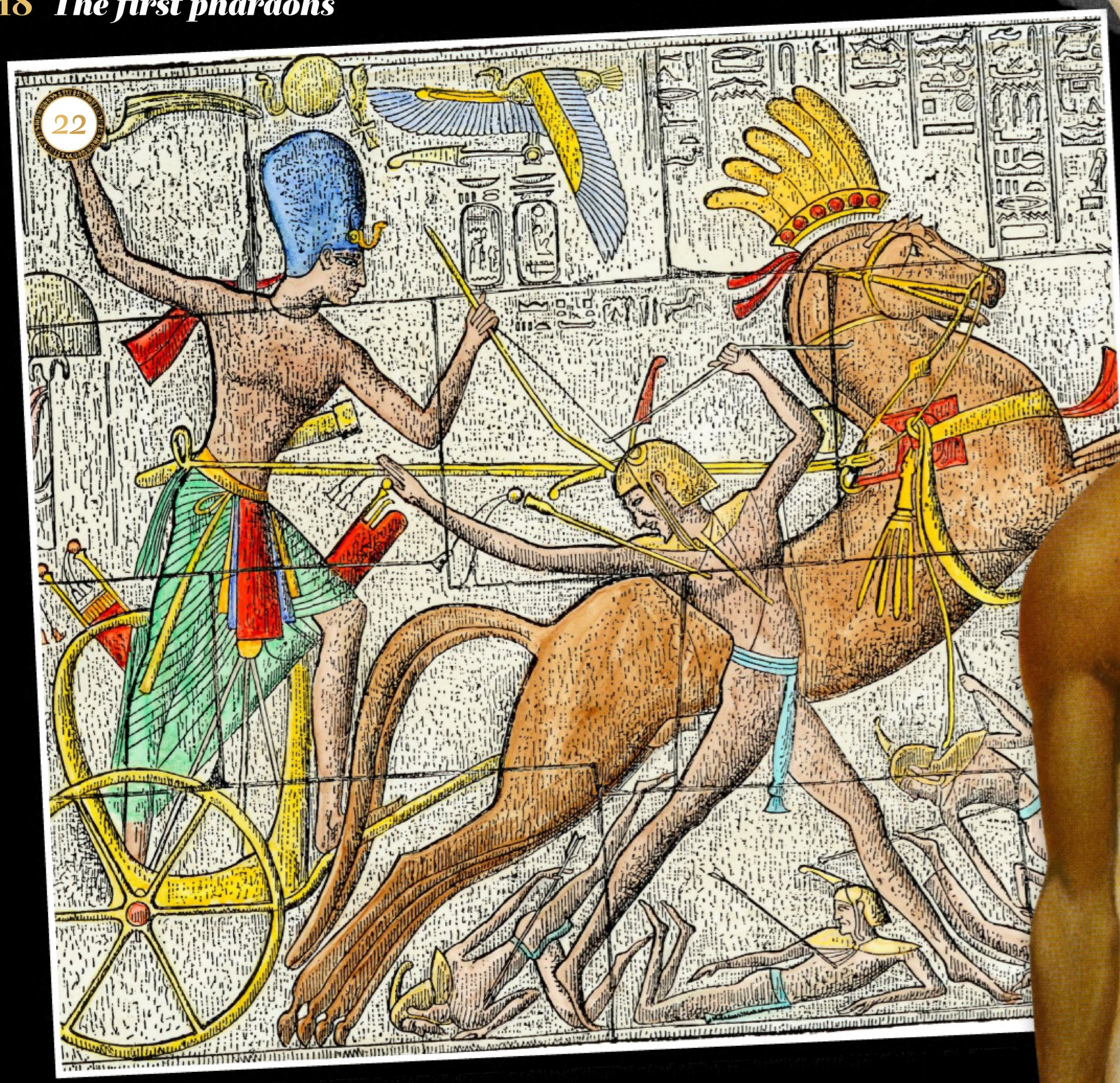
22 *Day in the life of a pharaoh*



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NARMER
FATHER OF EGYPT

The great ruler who unified Egypt and established a kingdom that endured for thousands of years

Words by James Horton

Ancient Egypt remains one of the most storied, romantic and revered eras in all of world history. As the juggernauts of North Africa for three millennia, the Egyptians had time to cultivate a fascinating culture, construct huge monuments to their rulers and gods, and leave behind a rich collection of relics that enable us to continue to engage with their story today. But every story must have a beginning, and at the budding stage of Egypt's was King Narmer, the first king of unified Egypt.

Unlike the swathes of published histories, oratories, biographies and personal accounts left to us by more recent civilisations like the Roman Empire, our sources stretching as far back in time to King Narmer – who reigned approximately five thousand years ago – are understandably scarce. But such was his importance that a slew of recovered artefacts document his achievements, with each relic largely corroborating the narrative of the rest.

Other artefacts that both pre-date and post-date Narmer's reign contextualise these pieces, enabling us to explore the changes that the first king brought to his country and its culture. In addition, the advancing science of bioarcheology has begun to unearth the movements of settlements and the state of farmland during this period. And so, armed with these precious fragments we can begin to piece together the gargantuan life of Egypt's first sole ruler.

There is one artefact, however, that warrants special mention. It is one of the world's oldest historical records: the Narmer Palette. The Palette itself was discovered in 1898, and has since been considered one of the most important historical finds of all time. With intricate and telling carvings on both sides, Narmer's Palette is our main gateway to the king himself, with the spine of his tale being engraved on the Palette's faces.

"Narmer's Palette was likely used for ceremonial purposes"

Typically, such slate palettes were used by the Egyptians for grinding and applying cosmetics, which were widely used. Many would apply cosmetics under the eyes to offset glare from the sun; hunters were ritually adorned with them before beginning a hunt; and they also served much as they do today – for simple fashion and enhancing beauty. But Narmer's Palette was likely used for ceremonial purposes within a religious shrine due to its large size, which was over double the size of a regular cosmetic palette. It may have been purely symbolic rather than functional, or possibly used for applying cosmetics to the shrine's resident deity statues. Whatever its use, we're extremely fortunate that the Palette has weathered five millennia intact.

Narmer

Narmer, also known as Menes, was traditionally the founder of the first dynasty and the unifier of Egypt

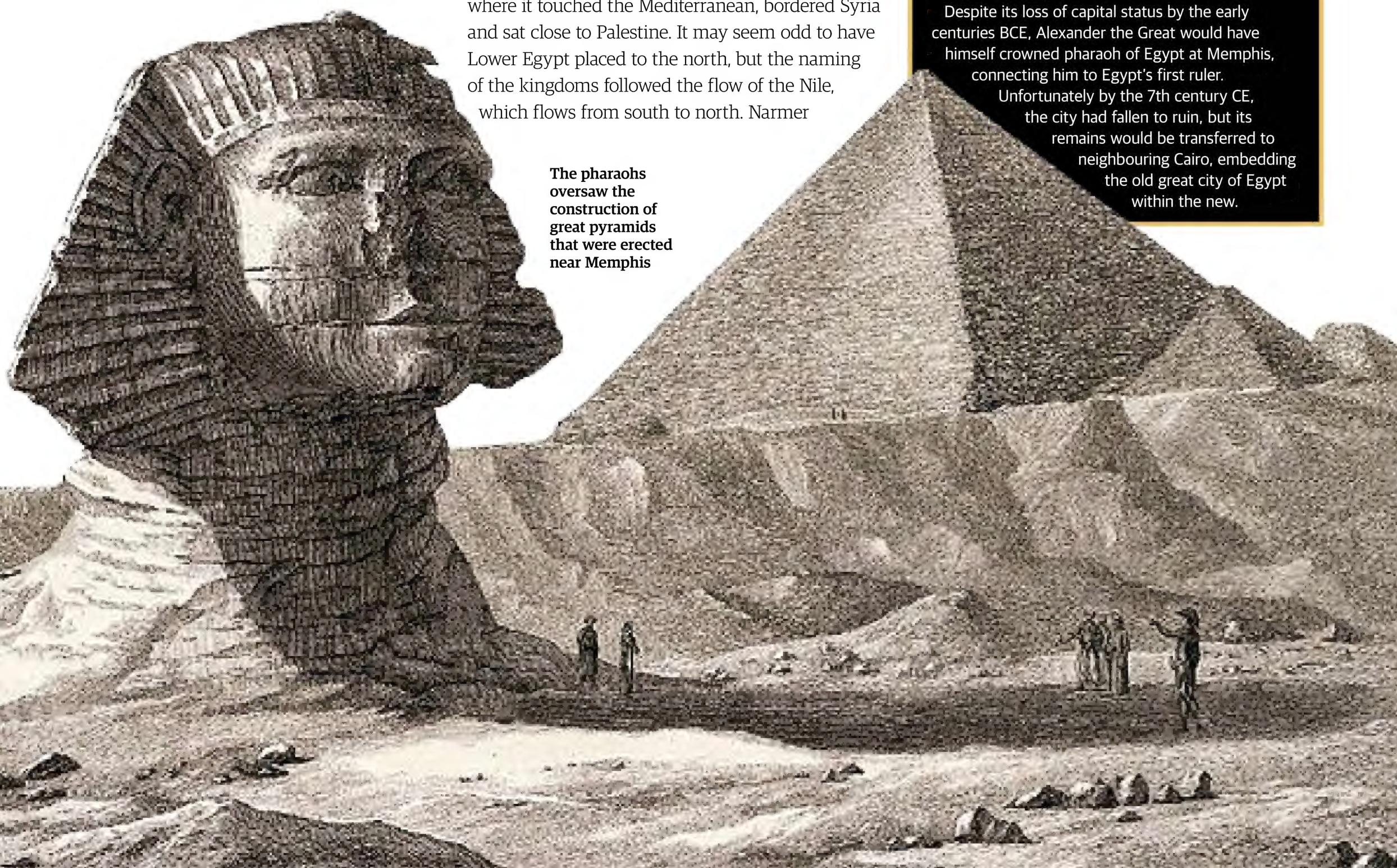
Now to the king's name. Usually such a simple signifier for a historical figure, but in Narmer's case it is one of his most contentious attributes. The Egyptians are famous for their artistic and symbolic language, delivered as hieroglyphs. These resembled images but performed the dual role of language, sometimes being used phonetically and sometimes pictographically. We understand Narmer's name under such circumstances – through one of the earliest documented cases of hieroglyphs written on the Narmer Palette.

On both sides of the Palette, on one face in the top-centre and on the other next to the king himself, are two hieroglyphs: a catfish and a chisel. The Ancient Egyptians pronounced catfish as 'nr' and sometimes chisel as 'mr'. If taken phonetically these symbols offer the king his name: 'nar-mer', or 'catfish-chisel' to use the modern English translation. However, Narmer has been claimed by some scholars to be a misnomer. First because chisel has another, more common pronunciation, and second because the catfish may have been intended to act purely as a symbol of the king, rather than a phonetic guide. Elsewhere on the Palette, Narmer is depicted as a falcon and a bull, and he may have also been depicted as a scorpion on other artefacts. The catfish may have been another such depiction of power from the animal kingdom – a fearsome predator like the falcon and scorpion.

The Narmer Palette was discovered in a deposit in Hierakonpolis, in the south of Egypt

Another complication with Narmer as a name is the later reference to one king Menes, who was documented elsewhere to have ruled over the same period. Menes may have been a predecessor or successor to Narmer, but likely they are one and the same. It's unclear whether Menes simply means 'someone' – as a consequence of the king's name being lost to history for a time – or 'he who endures'. Alternatively, perhaps Narmer was the king's Horus name. Whether truly known as Narmer, Menes or another name, history will remember Egypt's first king as 'catfish-chisel'.

Fortunately we have a bit more certainty over Narmer's position before he became Egypt's first unified king. During his ascendency to the throne, Egypt remained divided into two powers. Narmer's kingdom rested to the south, known as Upper Egypt. Lower Egypt was positioned to the north, where it touched the Mediterranean, bordered Syria and sat close to Palestine. It may seem odd to have Lower Egypt placed to the north, but the naming of the kingdoms followed the flow of the Nile, which flows from south to north. Narmer



The pharaohs oversaw the construction of great pyramids that were erected near Memphis

Memphis – the white-walled city

Uncover the heart of culture, commerce and power in Ancient Egypt

Legend holds that king Menes, or Narmer by another name, established the city of Memphis following the unification of Egypt. Sitting near the base of the Nile Delta in former Lower Egypt, Memphis would swiftly establish itself as a key commercial centre and would act as the formal seat of the pharaohs for roughly a thousand years. From their nexus of power in Memphis, the pharaohs would oversee and orchestrate the construction of great pyramids and temples, some of which still stand today.

During its infancy, the city was dubbed 'white walls' due to the whitewashed mud brick used to construct the king's palace. It was also associated with another name, Hut-Ka-Ptah, in honour of the patron deity of the city, Ptah. This would be of immense importance in the millennia to come, as the Greeks would contract the city's old name into Aegyptos, giving birth to the name of the country as we know it today.

Despite its loss of capital status by the early centuries BCE, Alexander the Great would have himself crowned pharaoh of Egypt at Memphis, connecting him to Egypt's first ruler.

Unfortunately by the 7th century CE, the city had fallen to ruin, but its remains would be transferred to neighbouring Cairo, embedding the old great city of Egypt within the new.

Chambers B17 and B18 at Umm El Qa'ab are believed by some to be the tomb of King Narmer

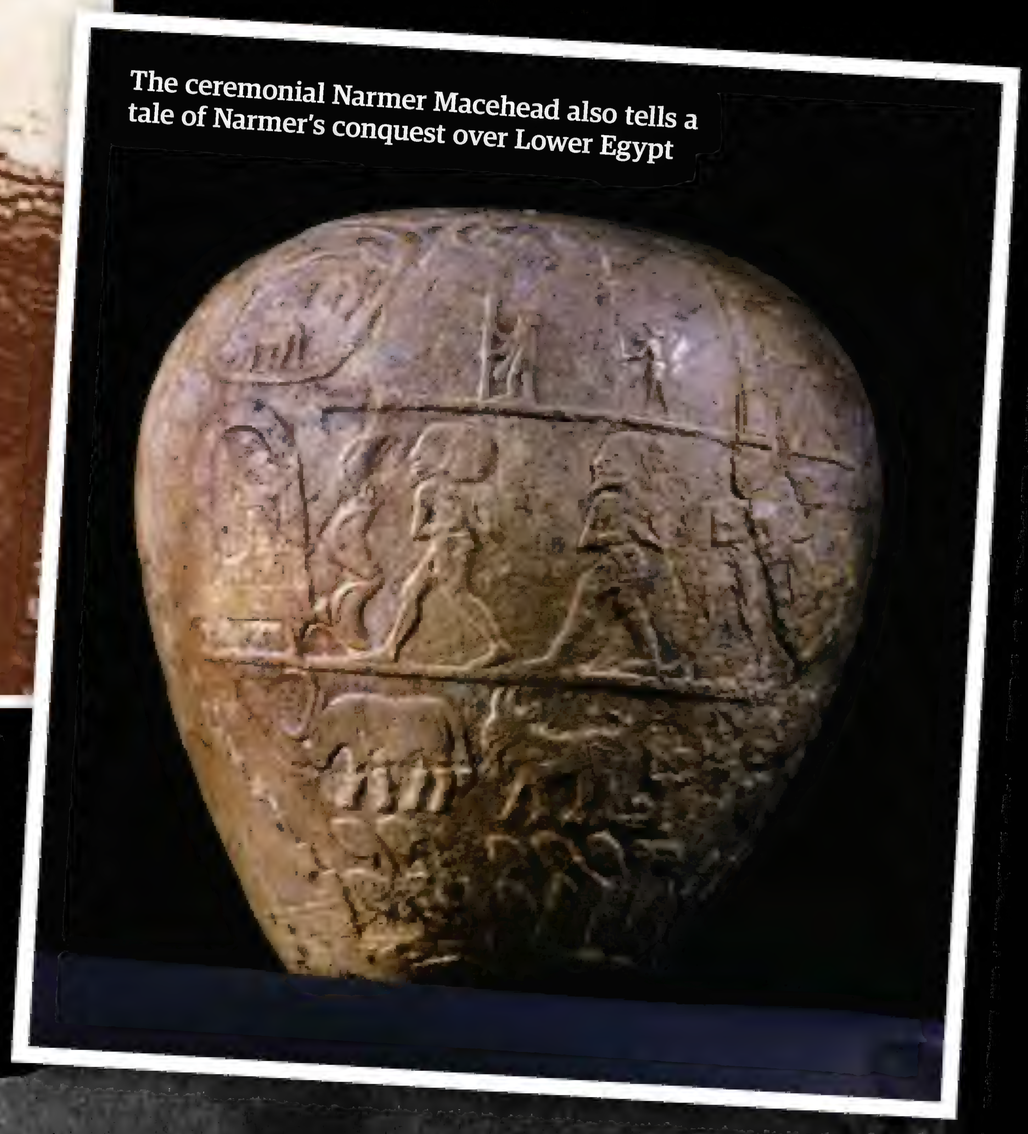
would become king of Upper Egypt and soon turn his attention to his neighbour, enveloping Lower Egypt and unifying the kingdom under his rule.

There are no historical depictions describing why Narmer marched on Lower Egypt, but we understand enough of the era to make an educated guess. The lifeblood of Egypt's greatness, as many know, was the River Nile. So much so that when the Greek historian Herodotus would visit Egypt in the 400s BCE, he would describe the nation as "the gift of the Nile." He did not intend this as a compliment to the people, but instead as a statement that without the Nile, Egypt would have failed to reach its meteoric heights. The river was indeed undeniably important: each year the water would run red, then green, then rise 30 metres (98 feet) and overflow its banks. As it receded, it would leave moist, highly fertile soil that the Egyptians would use as farmland. The locals did not understand the colour changes as a product of shifting top soil and floating vegetation, nor the rising water levels as a consequence of melting ice and heavy summer rains, but instead viewed it as a magical gift.

> The River Nile was considered immensely important to the Ancient Egyptians

Nearly the whole population of Egypt lived close to the Nile. Farmers from the hostile desert regions would migrate and settle near its banks, increasing the population. This may have begun to put pressure on Narmer and his court to expand and claim new territory for their people, and they would have little place to go than north. Keep to the Nile and find bountiful land, stray from it and find nothing but a mostly barren landscape.

However, the population of Narmer's kingdom was likely small – the Egyptian population numbered anywhere from 200,000 to two million



The ceremonial Narmer Macehead also tells a tale of Narmer's conquest over Lower Egypt

Later depictions of the royal crown would be a fusion of the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt

"Keep to the Nile and find bountiful land, stray from it and find nothing but a mostly barren landscape"

during this period – leading scholars to believe that available land would not have been an issue. But if not eyeing their northern neighbours for their fertile territory, they may have been envious of them for their trade links. Lower Egypt separated the Upper Egyptians from the Middle East and all the exotic items Narmer's court would have desired. To claim the north would be to claim borders with the Middle East and the Mediterranean Sea, gaining access to improved trade.

Therefore, it may have been that Upper Egypt, led by Narmer, had more to gain from being the aggressor than their Lower neighbour. The shift of power from Upper Egypt's heartland Hierakonpolis to Lower Egypt's Memphis following unification speaks volumes as to where the centre of the Egyptian economy lay, adding weight to the idea that Lower Egypt was eyed greedily by Narmer's court.

We find evidence on Narmer's Palette that Lower Egypt was indeed claimed by force, with the king, this time depicted as a bull, smashing down the walls of a city. On the reverse side we see the king standing proud after the victory; in his left hand he holds his kneeling, conquered foe by the hair, and in his right he holds a mace held high, ready to bludgeon the vanquished. Atop Narmer's head is the tall white crown of Upper Egypt. This pose, known now as smiting pose, would be mimicked by Narmer's successors for the next three thousand years.

We also see, for the first time, Narmer depicted as Horus himself on the same side of the Palette. The same defeated enemy is this time ensnared by the nose by a falcon – the animal representation of Horus – who grips the rope, binding the enemy firmly in his talons. Narmer and Horus, so the Palette professes, are the same entity. The Palette depicts him as a vessel for the god Horus on the Earth, establishing a tradition that would be continued by all pharaohs of Egypt that followed.

Above the image of the bull on the other side of the Palette, we appear to jump forward in time to Narmer's procession. He is depicted here as a giant, at least twice the size of those who march before him, and this time he wears the Lower crown, a testament to his rule over both kingdoms. And at the end of his procession, past his leopard-skin-adorned assistant and stand-bearers, lay his enemies. They have each been decapitated, and their hands remain bound behind their backs. The message is simple and clear: woe to those who defy the god-king. Egypt had been unified.

The verso side of the Narmer Palette shows the great king smiting his defeated enemy

The recto side of the Narmer Palette reveals the procession of Egypt's first unified king

Multiple artefacts and tomb engravings refer to Narmer through hieroglyphs

King Narmer was responsible for leading the Egyptian nation to greatness

A limestone head of an early Egyptian king, dated to the First Dynasty, is believed by some to be Narmer himself

It is hard to overstate Narmer's impact on Egypt's development into an ancient superpower. Not only did he envelop the lands of Egypt into the hands of a single ruler, but more fundamentally his rule showed that governance by a king, or later pharaoh, would lead the Egyptian nation to greatness. Imagine the transition from a fractured state – filled with pockets of people pursuing their own, disparate agendas – to a unified, homogeneous whole where all would work towards a common goal. This is the potential Narmer taught his successors.

With Narmer as the undisputed ruler of Egypt, he had the means to galvanise an entire population into taking action, and as such he was able to unlock his greatest resource: the Nile. There is some evidence for irrigation – where canals were dug from the Nile to increase water flow and fertile soil distribution further inland – occurring before Narmer's time. But never before had this effort been organised across an entire, unified Egypt. The output from farming near the Nile, perhaps more so than at any other time, offered a huge surplus of food. Men previously bound to farming, fishing and hunting were liberated from these tasks, and instead could have served in Egypt's army. Neighbouring regions who did not enjoy the bountiful yields offered by the great river would not have been able to muster as many soldiers, nor keep them in the field for as long. Excess food would have brought power, and huge amounts of it.

> Various religious practices and iconography developed during Narmer's reign

The Egypt that Narmer would leave behind would be a completely different entity from the one in which he was born. He would transform his nation into perhaps the greatest civilisation of the ancient world – one that would follow his example and stand proud and powerful for the next three thousand years, an undeniably formidable accomplishment. The core idea of a divine monarch also found its roots with Narmer, and this would permeate nearly every facet of Egyptian culture moving forward.

Indeed, carved knife handles preceding Narmer often placed emphasis on animals and the collective endeavour of the hunt. But in the reign of the pharaohs, these would transition to place an authority figure at the centre of the work. The pharaohs themselves would grow more enamoured with their status, building on Narmer's precedent. We have some evidence placing Narmer's tomb in Umm El Qa'ab in Upper Egypt. If this is accurate then Narmer's resting place was surprisingly modest compared to the god-kings who followed. Perhaps as their divine status was nurtured, so too did their ambitions for their remembrance, with epic structures being erected and assistants being slaughtered so that they may continue to serve their king in the afterlife. But despite their best efforts of self-promotion, few of Egypt's leaders would come close to mimicking the accomplishments of Narmer – founder of the First Dynasty and author of Egypt's first chapter.

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THE FIRST PHARAOHS

Uncover the leaders of Archaic Egypt and their quest to create a new kingdom

Words by Scott Reeves

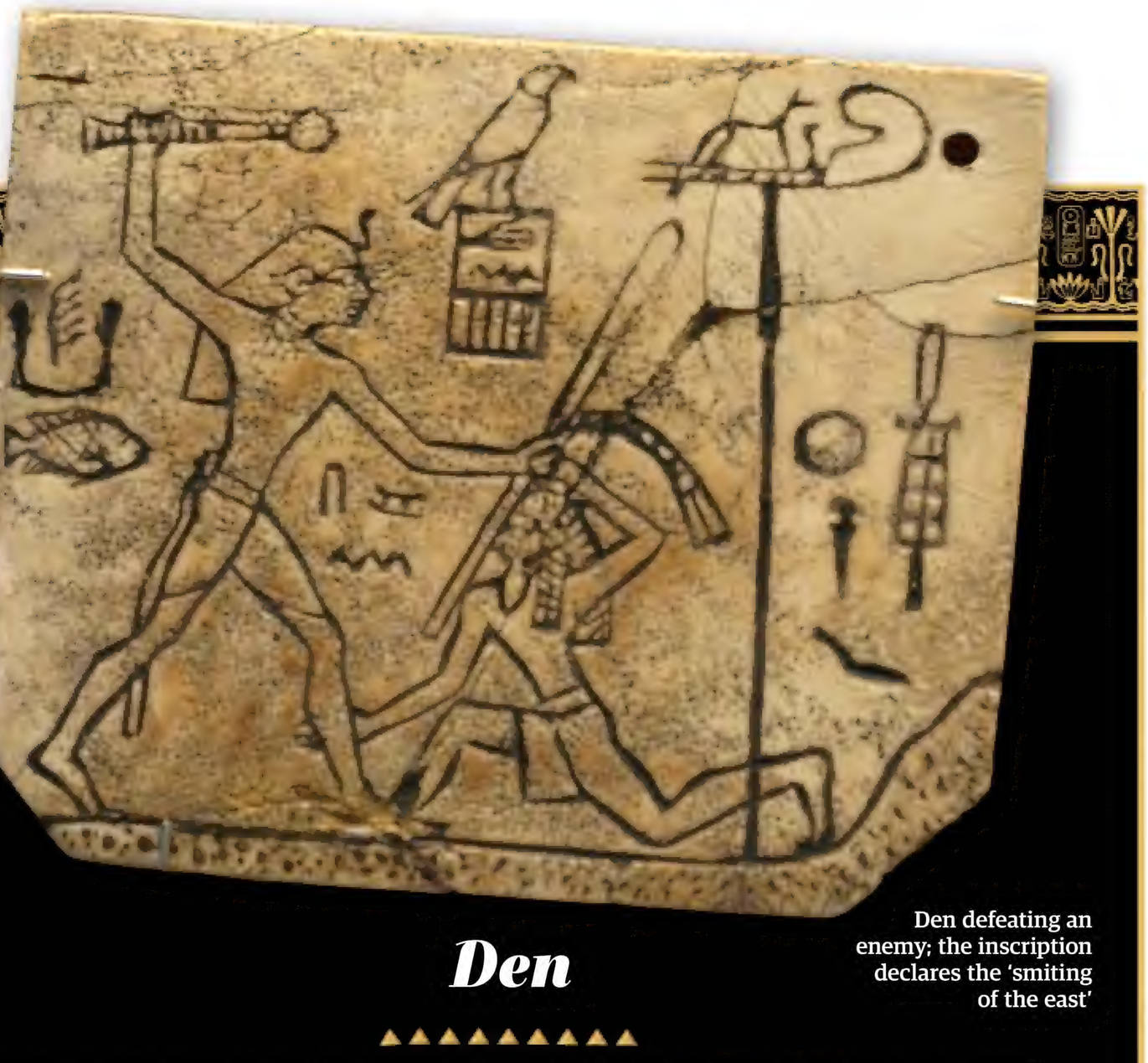
If Egyptologists can agree on one thing, it is that they will always disagree on what happened in the Archaic Period. During the five centuries after Narmer unified Upper and Lower Egypt into a single kingdom, the first pharaohs laid the foundations of 3,000 years of prosperous civilisation.

But exactly how they did this is unclear. Sources of information are scrappy at best; archaeologists must painstakingly piece together fragmentary inscriptions written in difficult-to-translate early hieroglyphics. The only contemporary records are the royal annals carved on the Palermo Stone – one of seven steles that together make up the royal annals – which give a snapshot of some of the major events and rituals, but the pharaohs it refers to usually carried multiple names and titles. Historians cannot agree on what order they ruled in, their relationships with each other, and even whether some pharaohs existed.

After decades of careful research, this is what Egyptologists have discovered about the most influential and interesting early pharaohs.

"Sources of information are scrappy at best"

Den is the first pharaoh to be shown wearing the combined white and red crowns of Lower and Upper Egypt



Den defeating an enemy; the inscription declares the 'smiting of the east'

Den

For a period in which there are very few sources of information, Den is one of the better-known Archaic pharaohs. The fifth ruler of the First Dynasty, Den took the primitive state created by his great-great-grandfather, Narmer, and established a system of royal government and ritual that lasted centuries beyond his death.

Den was the first pharaoh to be referred to as the King of Lower and Upper Egypt, and he may be the first depicted wearing the Pschent, the white and red crown that symbolically combined the two halves of Egypt. Den's administrators also introduced a system of hieroglyphic numbering for tax calculations and to denote year events; prior to this, years were depicted with more convoluted and easily confused symbols.

The first few years of Den's 42-year reign were spent sharing power with his mother, Merneith, suggesting that he acceded to the throne as a child and required a regent to rule on his behalf. Upon coming of age, the incomplete records that survive include numerous examples of Den smiting his enemies, shown by the pharaoh holding the hair of a defeated opponent in one hand and a mace in the other. Among those he conquered were the Iuntju ('people with hunting bows'), nomadic tribes from the east whose raids were a constant irritant. Since Den is the first pharaoh to be attested in rock carvings in the Sinai Peninsula, it is likely that he expanded his kingdom in the northeast. On other occasions, Den is celebrated in the royal annals for building projects including canals and a fortress.

Among his building projects was his own mastaba tomb, which was one of the grandest in Umm El Qa'ab. It followed the usual convention of mastabas – a rectangular structure with a flat roof and sloping walls with the tomb dug underneath – but it had a striking floor made from red and black granite paving stones. It was the first time that stone had been used in Egyptian funerary construction, although it is possible that the tomb was initially used as a storeroom since it was accessed by a staircase rather than a vertical shaft. Robbers may have viewed the tomb as a tempting target, but a wooden door blocked the stairs and a portcullis barred entry to the burial chamber.

Djer

Ancient Egyptians living in the Middle Kingdom flocked to the tomb of Osiris, the god of the Underworld, to celebrate festivals in his honour. But what the worshippers didn't realise was that the so-called sacred tomb was actually the last resting place of one of Egypt's earliest pharaohs.

Djer was probably the grandson of Narmer and the third pharaoh of the First Dynasty. Although his name had been largely forgotten by the time his tomb became a site of pilgrimage for Osiris, Djer ruled the young kingdom for around 40 years, with lands stretching from Memphis in the north to modern Aswan in the south.

When his long reign came to an end, Djer was buried alongside his grandfather and father in the largest tomb at Umm El Qa'ab – probably why it was attributed to Osiris centuries later – and he was not alone in being laid to rest during the funeral rituals. Subsidiary burials scattered around the tomb suggest that 318 retainers were killed and interred at the same time, a grisly sacrifice to ensure that the pharaoh would continue to be well looked after in the afterlife. Mass sacrifice was practised upon the death of every First Dynasty pharaoh, but it was Djer's funeral that was the bloodiest.

Djer's tomb was rediscovered and excavated in 1895 by Émile Amélineau, then again in 1900 by Flinders Petrie. Unfortunately, items that were of little contemporary interest were dumped, including a (probably female) skull fragment and a whole arm, meaning that possibly the earliest mummified royal remains ended up in a rubbish dump.

A ceremonial flint butchery knife with Djer's name on the golden handle

The tomb of Djer was surrounded by chambers for offerings and more than 300 sacrificed retainers

A restored stele (funerary slab) from the tomb of Qa'a

"Mass sacrifice was practised upon the death of every First Dynasty pharaoh"

Pottery lies scattered on the ground at Umm El Qa'ab, where all of the First Dynasty pharaohs lay buried

Qa'a

Archaeologists and historians have found only a few sources that refer to the reign of Qa'a, but they conclude that his time as pharaoh was long – around 33 years – and peaceful, with only routine ritual events taking place.

Seal impressions found in Saqqara, Abusir and Abydos point to him ruling over a large kingdom, while an inscription found near Elkab may suggest that mining was taking place in the Eastern Desert. Artefacts deriving from Syria and Palestine suggest that there was contact, via merchants or through the military, with tribes across the Sinai.

Such indications of prosperity certainly give no clues as to why the First Dynasty collapsed after the death of Qa'a. Nevertheless, his passing seems to have sparked a short civil war between two ephemeral rulers: Sneferka (although this may be an alternative name for Qa'a himself, suggesting that civil war broke out while Qa'a was still on the throne) and Horus Bird.

The tomb of Qa'a was relatively large, as would be expected of a long-lasting ruler, but evidence of fire and robbery shows that it was disturbed shortly after his burial, perhaps related to the disorder that followed his demise. The death of Qa'a did not just mark the end of the First Dynasty, but also the end of retainer sacrifice – the 26 subsidiary burials around the tomb are the last examples of retainers being put to death upon the burial of their king in Ancient Egypt.

Carvings in this stone mention Nynetjer and his Palace of the White Crown, possibly a reference to the white crown of Lower Egypt

Nynetjer is one of the best archaeologically attested kings of the Second Dynasty

A fragment of a vase bearing Nynetjer's name found in the tomb of one of his successors

Nynetjer

The third pharaoh of the Second Dynasty wasn't afraid to do things a little differently. He supposedly declared that women had the right to rule like a king – a move that may have provided posthumous recognition for First Dynasty queens Merneith and Neithhotep, who acted as regents for their young sons. It may also refer to his own mother; Nynetjer ruled for four decades and chances are that he became pharaoh as a child. He also overhauled the system of taxation, making a census known as 'the cattle count' one of the primary methods of assessing and collecting taxes.

Yet it wasn't until his death that Nynetjer's most influential policy occurred, decreeing that the Egyptian kingdom be split into two separate entities. Some believe it was the impact of an economic depression as Nile flood levels dropped around Memphis, while others think that the Egyptian state had become unwieldy and bureaucratic. Still more are under the impression that there was rebellion brewing in the north or that Nynetjer had already lost control of the south. Whatever the reason, the pharaoh believed that Egypt could be better governed if it were two different states with two different rulers. It's unclear whether his wishes were immediately implemented or whether he had a successor who clung to power across the realm for a short period, but it seems likely that at some point soon after Nynetjer died, Egypt became a divided kingdom once again.

If Nynetjer was struggling to keep a grip on a fractious kingdom, it is not apparent in his tomb, which bore similarities to mastabas of his predecessors at Saqqara. Discovered underneath a later royal funerary monument of Pharaoh Unas, Nynetjer's tomb was a maze of corridors 25 metres (82 feet) under the ground. One of the galleries had escaped the robbers and contained a wealth of objects including wine jars, some of which derived from the looted tombs of the First Dynasty at Umm El Qa'ab. A different gallery had been reopened in antiquity and had been used to house mummies from the 19th Dynasty, some 1,500 years after Nynetjer had lived and died.

An alabaster statue of Nynetjer, the oldest three-dimensional depiction of an Egyptian pharaoh

Hotepsekhemwy

Nothing is known of the origins and early life of the man who would become Pharaoh Hotepsekhemwy, but his choice of royal name – meaning 'the two mistresses are reconciled' – means he likely acceded to the throne after a period of strife following the death of Qa'a, his name symbolising that he had reunited two factions or the two halves of Egypt. Among his achievements was the restoration of the tomb of Qa'a, who was possibly his father-in-law, a clever piece of propaganda in which the first ruler of the Second Dynasty boosted his legitimacy by linking himself to the pharaohs of the past.

Nevertheless, Hotepsekhemwy did not fear breaking tradition when it suited him. Some claim his tomb was located at the necropolis at Saqqara, making him the first pharaoh to lie there (although others state that we don't actually know where his tomb is). It may be an indication that power was beginning to shift from Narmer's capital city of Thinis in Upper Egypt to Memphis in Lower Egypt, or it may have been a pragmatic reaction to the looting of the First Dynasty's tombs at Umm El Qa'ab.

Hotepsekhemwy was a prolific builder, ordering the construction of temples and a new royal residence. A disaster in his reign may also have required a programme of rebuilding since one ancient historian – writing more than 2,000 years later, it must be noted – reported an earthquake in the Nile Delta in which "a chasm opened near Bubastis and many perished."

A granite statue of a priest lists the first three kings of the Second Dynasty: Hotepsekhemwy, Raneb and Nynetjer

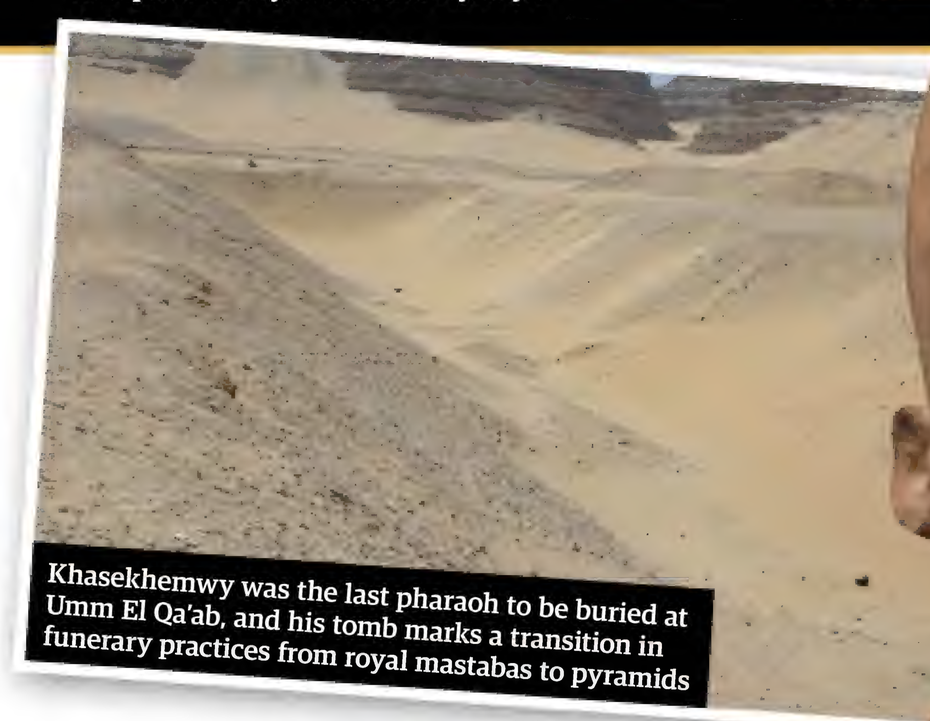
Hotepsekhemwy was the first of more than a dozen pharaohs to be buried at Saqqara

Khasekhemwy

Some 50 years after Nynetjer divided Egypt, it was reunited by the final pharaoh of the Second Dynasty. Historians are relatively confident that Khasekhemwy ruled for 18 years, although whether he began his reign only as king of Lower or Upper Egypt is unclear. What is known is that his royal crest contained the symbols of both Horus and Set, the deities of each half of the kingdom, and that he married a princess of the north to consolidate his position there.

Khasekhemwy was one of the busiest builders of the early dynastic period. He is known to have ordered the construction of a fort at Nekhen and a large tomb at Umm El Qa'ab, making him the final pharaoh to be inhumed at the complex favoured by the First Dynasty. Close by he oversaw the building of a funerary enclosure, a ritual space in which the dead pharaoh would be worshipped and still survives in remarkably good condition. He may also have been responsible for the Gisr el-Mudir at Saqqara, another funerary enclosure that lies near the tombs of his Second Dynasty predecessors.

Details in both funerary enclosures probably inspired the Step Pyramid built by his son or step-son successor, Djoser. Although contemporaries would not have recognised any distinction between them, the death of Khasekhemwy and succession of Djoser marked the end of the Archaic Period and the beginning of the Third Dynasty and the Old Kingdom. The Age of the Pyramids had begun.



Khasekhemwy was the last pharaoh to be buried at Umm El Qa'ab, and his tomb marks a transition in funerary practices from royal mastabas to pyramids

A fragment of the Palermo Stone describing part of Khasekhemwy's 18-year reign

Khasekhemwy reunited Egypt and brought the Archaic Period to a close

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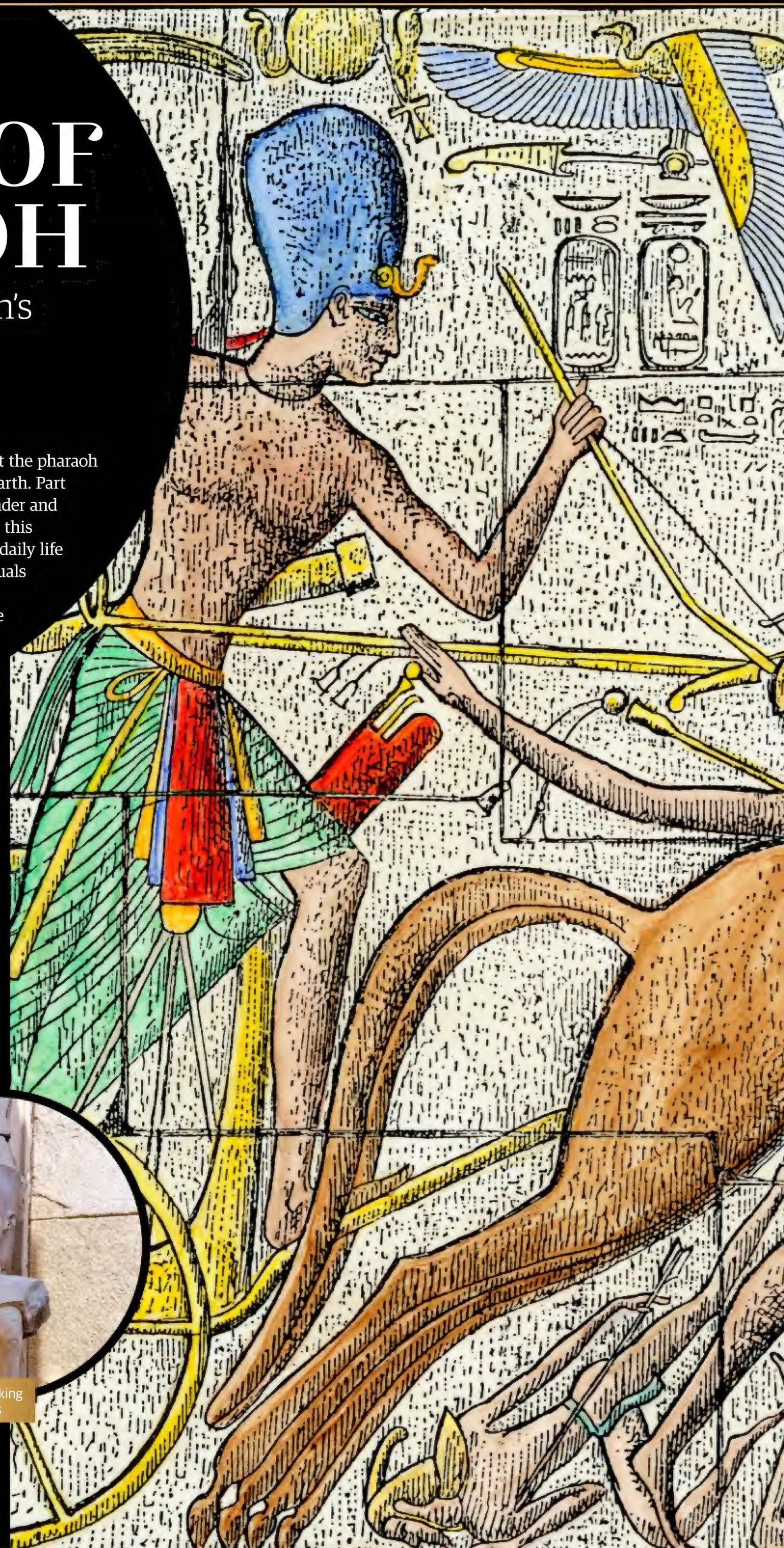
DAY IN THE LIFE OF A PHARAOH

Part ruler, part god, the pharaoh's life was one of ritual and rule



Words by Steve Wright

Far more than just a ruler, in Ancient Egypt the pharaoh was seen as the gods' representative on Earth. Part king, part high priest, part battle commander and part lawmaker, for more than 3,000 years this figurehead was central to everyday life. As such, their daily life encompassed a wide variety of responsibilities and rituals in line with his or her lofty status, all of which were considered essential to both the running of the empire and its spiritual development. Here, we look at what might have been in store on a particular day as the pharaoh went about their divine business.

GETTING READY FOR THE DAY

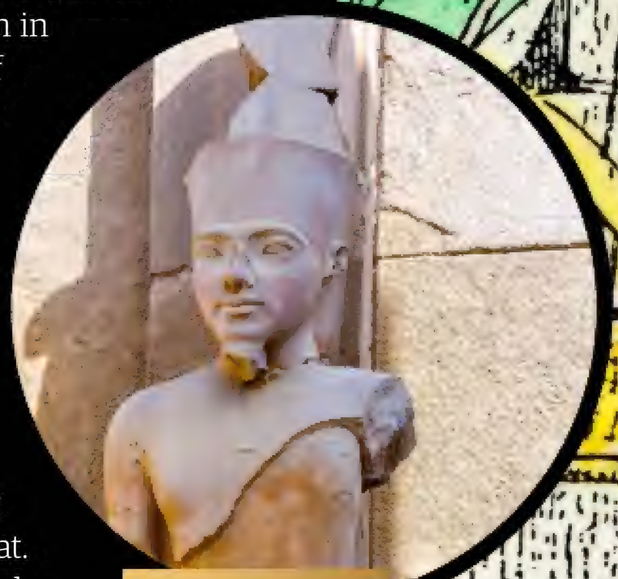
Upon waking, the pharaoh was washed and dressed by their servants, in addition to being adorned with various pieces of jewellery. Subordinates each had individual responsibilities - for loincloths, linen, perfume and so on - with one such title being 'Chief of The Scented Oils and Pastes for Rubbing His Majesty's Body'.

DAILY MEETINGS

Their next task would be to hold their daily meetings with a variety of guests and officials, including military commanders, foreign ambassadors and various courtiers. Having prostrated themselves before the pharaoh, they would each speak in turn in order of rank about matters of state, and hear the pharaoh's thoughts on the matter.

TEMPLE

The pharaoh would then visit the temple to pay tribute to Amun-Ra, the chief god. Failure to do so could mean the empire losing its divine order, known as Maat. Having conversed with the god via his statue, a bull would then be sacrificed in honour of the gods.



Amun-Ra, the king of the gods

TOUR OF THE CITY

Having had lunch, on some days the pharaoh would then travel around the city via chariot – a sight that would often be met with large crowds of people. While doing this, the pharaoh may visit building sites to monitor progress – he alone was responsible for approving their construction.

RECREATIONAL TIME

Having undertaken his primary responsibilities as a king and religious leader for the day, the pharaoh would then be in a position to take some downtime. This could involve participating in sporting activities such as archery, going hunting, spending time with his family or alternatively wandering through the royal gardens.

Archery was often a favoured recreational activity of pharaohs

HEALTH CHECK-UPS

Naturally, pharaohs were afforded the very best of medical care. These included a dentist and chief physician, among others. Relying on a combination of medicine and magic, thanks to the various exhumed mummies, it can be seen that pharaohs' doctors did a good job on the whole, as few showed after-effects of serious diseases.

ROYAL BANQUET

Towards the end of the day, the pharaoh would attend a large feast alongside their family and numerous other guests. Some of the food was supplied by the temple, with the pharaoh sometimes choosing to honour particular attendees by personally selecting them to receive some of this food.

DAY'S END

Finally, the pharaoh would retire to their chambers for the night, having previously returned to the temple for one final ceremony marking the setting of the sun, and thus the end of the day. The next morning, the pharaoh (and the sun) would rise again, and the day would begin anew.

The pharaoh was responsible for approving all construction – including of pyramids and temples

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OLD KINGDOM

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The statue of Djoser, stored in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo

King Djoser and his architect consult near a royal pyramid at Saqqara

THE REIGN OF DJOSER

How one of the early pharaohs of the Third Dynasty helped give the Egyptian Empire its grandeur

Words by Steve Wright

The further back in time you go, the harder it inevitably becomes to produce reliable accounts of an individual's life. Even for a civilisation like the Ancient Egyptians, who were prolific in their construction of storytelling monuments that stood the test of time, many of their early pharaohs and figures of historical significance remain enigmatic with regards to much of their life, enabling myth and legend to take root.

This can notably be applied to the life of Djoser. Whether it's the length of his reign (accounts vary from 19 years to as long as 28), his actual name (he is referred to at various times as Netjerikhet, meaning 'divine of body', Tosorthros and Sesorthos), or even his place in Egyptian chronology (he's thought to be the first ruler of the Third Dynasty, but even this can't be proved beyond all doubt), he remains elusive. In some cases, such as the name of his wife, Hetephernebti, what we have to go on by way of proof is incredibly abstract, namely a fragment of a relief on a building in the city of Hermopolis.

What cannot be argued, however, is the significance the period of his rule bears in the context of Egyptian history. The word 'djoser' is drawn from the djed symbol of stability – a gross understatement when applied to Djoser's reign. Ultimately, the advances made during this period would prove to be of great importance, enabling his empire to bear witness to a fast-paced construction programme of tombs, temples and assorted other monuments that both gave Egypt its identity and paved the way for its future growth as an empire.

It's difficult to discern his drive and motivations for this, since we know so little about him as a person. The son of his mother, Nimaathap, and father, Khasekhemwy (the last king of the preceding Second Dynasty), it is believed that he succeeded his father, although it's also claimed that he came after his brother, Sanakhte. After becoming pharaoh around 2668 BCE, he went on to marry Hetephernebti, who may also have been his half sister, taking on no additional wives, despite it not being unusual for pharaohs to do so, and had a daughter, Inetkaes.

> *"Djoser would embark on many building projects"*

While nothing is known about the circumstances surrounding his death, the mystery over his life ultimately bears little significance compared to what was achieved during Djoser's reign. Much was achieved, but he couldn't have done it alone. To this end, pharaohs appointed a high chancellor – sometimes known as a vizier – to assist them in assorted matters of state. The appointee was a man called Imhotep.

While he may not have been the god of medicine that he was later deified as yet – nor the megalomaniacal supervillain that *The Mummy* films have ascribed his name to – he was clearly an extremely talented architect, a skill that was put to good use under Djoser. Among the numerous titles he possessed – Chancellor of the King of Lower Egypt, First after the King of Upper Egypt, Administrator of the Great Palace and High Priest of Heliopolis, to name a few – were Chief Carpenter and Chief Sculptor.

With Imhotep at his side, Djoser would embark on a great many building projects, erecting many of the earliest stone structures. To make these programmes feasible, however, they had

Bas-relief representing Pharaoh Djoser from the remains of Djoser's temple at Heliopolis

One of the many reliefs adorning the walls of the burial grounds at Saqqara

to maintain control of their borders. To this end, campaigns were fought across the Sinai on the eastern desert borders, such as those against the nomadic Bedouin tribes, and against the Libyans in the west, during which he annexed part of their lands.

In addition to consolidating control of the empire, these areas contained rich quarries full of vital materials like stone, copper and turquoise. His strength proved on the field of battle, it was clear to all that he had the favour of the gods, and thus his authority was assured, with Egypt able to evolve without foreign interference. Historian Margaret Bunson writes of a statue in the complex at Saqqara depicting him "standing on foreigners... and on the opposing clans of native Egyptians called the Lapwings or Rekhet." Clearly he was revered as a warrior just as much as he was a ruler.

Stone in particular was greatly prized – durable and long-lasting, stone structures were built to stand the test of time, unlike the mud buildings that earlier attempts, like the complex at Abydos, utilised. It's fitting that they were used to build what is arguably the most well-known monument to Djoser's legacy: the Step Pyramid at Saqqara, built to house the tomb of Djoser himself. While it has been frequently raided over the years – most of Djoser's body has been lost as a consequence – the fact that it is largely still standing today serves as testament to the ingenuity of the builders during Djoser's reign.

It wasn't just the exterior majesty of the pyramids that proved a source of fascination, however; the intricate nature of the interiors remains a source of wonder even today. Protected by a series of fake entrances aimed at deterring would-be burglars, the granite burial chamber itself was usually contained in an underground chamber, entry to which was gained by traversing a series of corridors.

> The other chambers in the subterranean complex were used for ceremonial purposes

These structures also bore much spiritual significance. The soul was thought to be devised of nine characteristics, one of which was the ba, a bird-shaped image that could fly off to the heavens, but needed some form of landmark to ground itself into Earth, the all-important resting place for the soul as it entered the afterlife – which was where the pyramid came in. And it wasn't just this structure that was needed; surrounding it were assorted courtyards and shrines, as well as living spaces for the priests that served there. As time progressed and more pharaohs chose Saqqara as their resting place, it would only increase in size.

Unsurprisingly, Saqqara remains a popular destination for tourists

The significance of the pyramid was more than just a tomb or landmark, however. Already important as the capital of ancient Egypt, Djoser gave Memphis increased gravitas by being the first pharaoh to make it his permanent base. In turn, Memphis further developed as the political and cultural centre of Ancient Egypt during the era of the Old Kingdom – a status it kept hold of for hundreds of years.

Other accounts of Djoser's rule probably lean heavily into the 'myth' category, but they still deserve to be repeated, if only for the association his name has with the prosperity Egypt was experiencing. The most well-known of these is the Famine Stela, the name given to a seven-year drought that plagued Egypt during Djoser's rule. Under Imhoptep's advice, Djoser journeyed to the small island of Elephantine on the River Nile near Aswan. Coincidentally, Djoser had also had a dream in which the river god Khnum complained to him that the temple of Sehel had fallen into disrepair, and that people had lost their respect for the god. Upon arriving, Djoser prayed to Khnum, and constructed a new temple in its place. Thereafter he issued a decree commanding the people to resume making regular offerings to the gods.

An aerial view of the complex at Saqqara

While the veracity of much of this account obviously cannot be confirmed (indeed, it is almost certainly legend), what can't be denied is the lasting legacy it provided, as this temple, along with the courtyard surrounding it and some of the outer buildings, are still standing today. Its legacy is both of a solid structure, and of a monument to Djoser's popularity.

Moreover, various towns and cities began to grow and expand, with all-new ones springing up too. The complex at Saqqara, with its strong emphasis on monuments and ornamentation, proved to be an inspiration for other aspects of Egyptian society. This was informed by the increasing numbers of monuments and statues, as well as the importance of rituals in everyday life. Increasingly, pharaohs were becoming looked upon as more than just kings and battle commanders; they were gods, and Ancient Egyptian society became progressively more geared towards ascribing their leaders with the reverence this status entailed. The intricate and lavish facilities granted to the dead pharaohs of Egypt and their relatives became commonplace in the aftermath of Djoser's rule.

Ultimately, much of Djoser's relevance can be put down to not just what was achieved during his reign, but the foundations it laid for what was to come. The Stone Pyramid would be the obvious inspiration for even more remarkable crowning glories to come, such as the Pyramids of Giza, in addition to various other stone structures that still adorn the landscape of Egypt today. A painted limestone statue of Djoser now resides at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, and the pyramid remains a much-admired cultural landmark. While thanks to the efforts of thieves and looters over the years, all that remains of Djoser's actual body is a mummified foot; his legacy in transforming the Egyptian Empire has stood the test of time.

The final resting place

Djoser left a sizeable monument to himself

As we've touched on, one of the most memorable legacies of Djoser's reign is the funerary complex at Saqqara, believed to have been constructed around the 27th century BCE.

Designed by Imhotep in his capacity as royal architect, and renowned as the first pyramid in Egypt, in a number of regards it can be viewed as an early prototype for later efforts. For a start, in contrast to the numerous steps present on later pyramids, this effectively consisted of six rectangular blocks, otherwise known as mastabas, piled up on top of one another, getting progressively smaller until the top of its 62-metre (203-foot) height.

Underneath the pyramid, which was originally coated in limestone, are various chambers and galleries, which served as burial grounds for the pharaoh and his family. An additional 16 pharaohs would build pyramids at Saqqara, and it would continue to be used as a burial ground for both royal and non-royal purposes for thousands of years.

Excavated by Egyptologist Jean-Philippe Lauer during the 20th century and designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979, much of the site remains standing from its original construction, despite recent instances of historical upheaval like the 2011 Egyptian protests.

Djoser's Step Pyramid at Saqqara

© Alamy, Getty Images

THE MEDJAY
SUDAN DWELLERS TURNED ELITE POLICE FORCE

This group of warriors went from skilled mercenaries to the pharaohs' protectors of the peace

Words by Lee Cavendish

The period of the New Kingdom of Egypt, between the 16th and 11th centuries BCE, saw the introduction of a paramilitary force that would guard the pharaohs and their land against foreign invasion as well as protect the peace. This elite force was called the Medjay.

These formidable royal bodyguards originated from an ethnic group in eastern Sudan, and were related to the Nubians. Renowned for their fine fighting skills and military prowess, they were hired by the Egyptians as mercenaries, and after successfully proving themselves, the group evolved into what can only be defined as the national police force.

The Medjay kept the peace for an extraordinary amount of time, lasting right through the Middle Kingdom of Egypt, 2050 to 1710 BCE, and the 18th dynasty, 1550 to 1292 BCE, with mention of them only fading during the reign of the 20th dynasty, from 1189 to 1077 BCE.

Their influence over Egypt grew, and so did everything about them. The Medjay went from Nubian warriors to an improved armed force that wielded both influence and ever-improving weaponry. They even used animal companions in the form of dogs and monkeys in their efforts to ensure stability.

The regions that were their main focus were any areas that were of interest to the pharaoh, such as major cities, royal cemeteries and the nation's borders. A well-structured hierarchy enabled the delegation of responsibilities to Medjay officers in their respective areas of operation, and this foresight proved vital when invaders - known as 'Hykos', or 'rulers of foreign land' - breached the boundaries of the empire. When enemies came calling, it fell to the Medjay to take care of them with any force necessary.

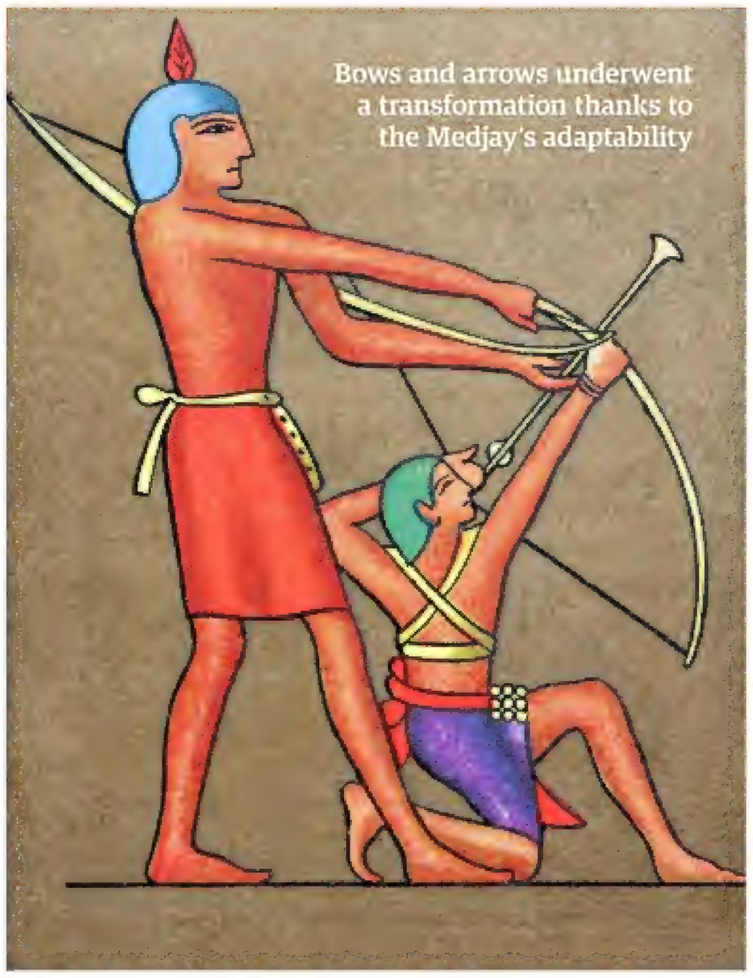
Hierarchy of the Medjay

A hierarchic system has provided the backbone of police forces and military institutions since time immemorial, and there is plenty of evidence to suggest that the Medjay were no different.

Just like any modern police force, there was a chain of command within the Medjay. The lowest rung of this ladder featured the soldiers tasked with protecting civilians and properties usually located around the borders. Above them were the captains for each region, and at the summit sat the chief, with his deputies superior to the captains but answerable to him.

Evidence for such a hierarchy can be found in the reign of the pharaoh Thutmose IV, where there is mention of the 'Captain of the Medjay of the West of the City', a position that would have entailed the protection of the west bank of Thebes, an Ancient Egyptian city located along the Nile. While immigrants could be moulded into Medjay warriors, Egyptians always filled the higher positions, with their chiefs most likely selected by the pharaoh.

Pharaoh Thutmose IV had a detachment of Medjay responsible for protecting the borders



Weapons of the Medjay

Weapons in Ancient Egypt prior to the New Kingdom were restricted by the knowledge and technology of the time, and they proved to be unreliable in battle. However, when the Hyksos began invading Ancient Egypt, they also brought their improved weaponry with them, which was later utilised effectively by the Medjay.

Examples of this were discovered at one of the excavation sites at Avaris (the capital of Egypt under the Hyksos), where there was an assault on Ahmose I. The bows and arrows were an instrument of war that reaped the benefits of the Hyksos invasion. The Egyptians then went from using a single-arch bow to composite ones, which were made from wood and reinforced with sinew and horn. This made for a pliant bow that could provide a longer range.

A particularly interesting weapon was the khopesh (also known as khepesh). A sickle-shaped sword, it was curved almost like a hook and made entirely of bronze with hide and cloth wrapped around the handle. It was typically between 50 to 60 centimetres (20 to 24 inches) in length, and it was a particular favourite as it was far more effective than the blades that had preceded it, particularly when it came to disarming opponents quickly.

Other than these major additions to the arsenal of the Medjay, there was the inclusion of battle axes and daggers that were made from unalloyed copper. This provided a much finer cut than the tin or bronze that was commonly used before the arrival of enemy soldiers.

"They were hired by the Egyptians as mercenaries"

Armour and uniform

Because of the climate in northern Africa, heavy armour wasn't an option when it came to battle – instead clothing was light and troops relied on as little protective uniform as possible. During the Middle Kingdom, the Medjay wore the same short linen kilts that any workman would have donned. The Nubians, the natives of the region where the Medjay originated, have never been depicted in helmets, leading historians to believe they did not wear protection on their heads either.

In terms of protection, the Ancient Egyptian warriors would carry shields for defence in battle. Although their shapes and sizes often depended on the soldier's weapon of choice, they all comprised a wooden frame with cowhide or leather stretched over it. Although bronze was used during the time of the New Kingdom, it did make the shields much heavier and it was far more vulnerable to being pierced by a spear than a leather shield due to the latter's higher elasticity.

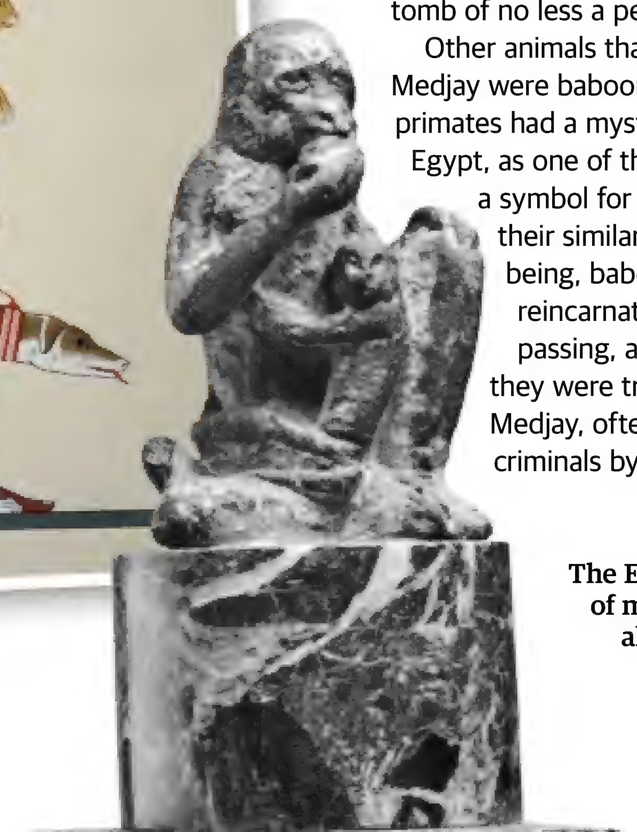
The two ancient Nubian warriors are sporting little in the way of armour, especially when compared to the other three soldiers on the right

Aside from their policing duties, dogs were often used for hunting

Trained animals

Much like the police of today use dogs as their crime-fighting companions, dogs were also used in Ancient Egypt for the same purpose. The Medjay would train them in order to help with the apprehension of criminals when guarding public places, with preferred breeds including the Basenji and Ibizan, the latter of which was depicted on the tomb of no less a person than Tutankhamen.

Other animals that were trained to aid the Medjay were baboons and monkeys. These primates had a mysterious affinity with Ancient Egypt, as one of their gods, Babi (or Babu), was a symbol for life after death. Because of their similar appearance to this divine being, baboons were thought to be the reincarnation of humans after their passing, and for the same reasons they were trained to be members of the Medjay, often tasked with impeding fleeing criminals by clinging onto their legs.



The Egyptians made statues of monkeys, but they were also used by the Medjay

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KHUFU
GIZA'S LONG-LOST PHARAOH

The pharaoh Khufu may have left his mark on the world with the Great Pyramid, the only remaining ancient wonder of the world, but his own resting place remains a mystery

Words by Dom Reseigh-Lincoln

The Great Pyramid, a symbol of Ancient Egyptian engineering and ingenuity, remains one of the world's most domineering structures. Standing 146.5 metres (480 feet) tall, it towers above the other two pyramids of Giza, the Great Sphinx and the remains of the Necropolis, a stark reminder of how powerful the empire of the Ancient Egyptians was.

And yet, we know very little about the man who had such an awe-inspiring symbol of power erected. The life of King Khufu has remained a subject of great fascination for historians and archaeologists for decades – most notably for the fact that the Old Kingdom monarch's remains are nowhere to be found. So what happened to the great monarch of Ancient Egyptians? And how can the mysteries of the Great Pyramid be unlocked?

The son of King Sneferu, the originator of the Fourth Dynasty, Khufu remains a figure of deep historical mystery. Hailing from an era of Egyptian rule known as the Old Kingdom, he was one of many pharaohs whose exploits have become muddled with the passage of time. As a result, much of the information we have is debated to this day, but many historians believe he was born in around 2609 BCE. His full name was 'Khnum-Khufwy', which means '[the god] Khnum protect me' and he came to the throne when he was in his twenties, following the death of his father.

Almost immediately, Khufu began orchestrating the construction of what would become the Great Pyramid. His father had also built a number of pyramids in his lifetime, but Khufu was determined to step out of his father's dynasty-founding shadow and make his true mark on the world. His reign lasted between 26 and 46 years, so considering the Great Pyramid took around 10 to 20 years to construct, it was a project that would define his rule.

The only completely preserved portrait of the king is a 7.6cm (3in) high ivory figurine found in a temple ruin of later period at Abydos in 1903

The 'solar ship', recovered from the foot of the Great Pyramid, was mostly in pieces when it was discovered

Accounts differ as to how Khufu constructed the grand tomb. The Greek historian Herodotus believed Khufu built the entire structure using indentured slaves. However, Herodotus' version of the pharaoh comes to a questionably negative conclusion, presenting Khufu as a cruel despot of a leader who sold his own daughter into prostitution. The Westcar Papyrus also presents a different view of Khufu; in this ancient document, the Fourth Dynasty ruler was a pious man, one who treated his subjects with kindness and embraced the nature of Ancient Egyptian spirituality. As such, this document presents Khufu as a man who hired workers to construct the pyramid, although such a project would have taken a significant blow to the royal coffers.

As with so many areas related to Khufu, the nature of his political dealings are patchwork in nature – however, a number of inscriptions and papyri have revealed that the monarch was often preoccupied with trade and the acquisition of goods. At the Wadi Maghareh in Sinai, a rock inscription depicts Khufu with the double crown, a sign of his powerful status in the region. The region was known for its turquoise and copper mines, two materials popular in Egyptian arts and construction. Khufu also sent envoys to trade with the Mediterranean city of Byblos, looking to acquire Lebanese cedar wood for shipbuilding and more. He was a builder king who saw currency in resources and raw materials.

An ivory head statue thought to depict Khufu, now on display in Germany

And so Khufu would begin construction on the structure that has become the symbol of the entire breadth of the Ancient Egyptians, his crowning achievement as a ruler: the Great Pyramid. The structure took between one to two decades to build – and a staggering 2,300,000 stone blocks were used to create it – and saw a jump in engineering prowess between the pharaohs and builders of the Third Dynasty and those of Khufu and the Fourth. Prior to Sneferu, the kings of Egypt often built small, flat-topped tombs to house their bodies, but pharaohs such as Khufu had a far bigger titan of a structure in mind.

Records suggest Khufu's builders, whether enslaved or paid, worked on the Great Pyramid some time between 2589 and 2504 BCE, heaving more than two million stone blocks weighing at least two tons each. The base of the pyramid covers 55,000 square metres (592,000 square feet) with each side greater than 20,000 square metres (215,000 square feet) in area, making it an incredible sight to behold for the ancient and modern eye. The architectural innovation displayed by the Fourth Dynasty, seemingly emerging from nowhere, didn't stop there, with the cornerstone foundations of each side using a back and socket design to protect the pyramid from earthquakes.

Even the cement used to hold every giant stone block together was the product of innovation – one that modern engineers have failed to recreate in modern tests. And the fact that this substance has kept the Great Pyramid upright for over 2,000 years proves just how resourceful these Fourth Dynasty builders were. The outside of the pyramid that we see today wasn't the finished product the Ancient Egyptians enjoyed in person either. Upon completion, the exterior of Khufu's supposed tomb was layered with casing stones made of highly polished limestone. This made the Great Pyramid a shining beacon at the centre of the Egyptian realm, but its casings were stripped centuries later by Muslim traders following the end of the dynasties.

Today, Khufu's Great Pyramid and the rest of the structures at Giza continue to fascinate archaeologists and scientists. As the last remaining ancient wonder of the world, great care has been taken to preserve their ancient identities. As such, the methods by which experts are reevaluating these structures has had to evolve in order to provide insight without causing lasting damage.

One such method includes techniques such as thermal scanning and 'muon' based radiography (muons are elementary particles similar to

The huge 'solar ship', now reconstructed, was buried with Khufu to carry him and his riches into the afterlife

A statue of Sneferu, the father of Khufu, who built the Bent Pyramid

The ring of Cheops (Cheops is another name used for Khufu)

electrons, but with a greater mass) and are used as part of the home-grown Egyptian initiative ScanPyramids, which is helping us peer into the past like never before. "The ScanPyramids mission is an international scientific project that has been launched by the HIP (Heritage Innovation Preservation) Institute, the Faculty of Engineering (Cairo University) and the Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities," reveals president and co-founder Mehdi Tayoubi. "Our goal is to gather the best scientific teams in the world who have non-destructive techniques to try and 'see' through the stones rather than disturb them."

The research is centred around the use of muons, whose heavier masses make them ideal for bouncing through solid objects to build up detailed images of the structure within. "We are using three different techniques involving muon radiography," adds Tayoubi on the subject. "We also use laser scans and photogrammetry techniques to get the most accurate 3D model of Giza and Dashour."

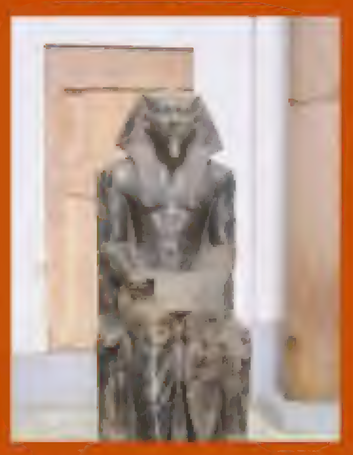
Projects such as ScanPyramids are just one of many new programmes created to better understand the internal structure of the Great Pyramid, as well as locating potential hidden voids or structures via a series of non-invasive techniques. The multi-disciplinary approach is one that's walking the bleeding edge of new scanning technology with a number of techniques barely out of research laboratories before they're employed in the field. And with Tayoubi and his team already on site at Giza studying the Great Pyramid, he's looking forward to sharing their data with everyone from experts specialising in ancient architecture to particle physicists and engineers.

Giza's great pharaohs

The Great Pyramids at Giza are testament not only to the ingenuity and engineering prowess of an ancient culture, but an almost everlasting statement from a handful of incredibly powerful men. The pharaohs were already the most powerful and spiritually pure beings in the kingdom, but these few weren't satisfied with earthly glory – they wanted structures that would ensure their survival for time immemorial. From Khufu to Menkaure, these men would express their power like no other – and their mark on the world would live on for thousands of years.

Khufu

For a man believed to have commissioned the Great Pyramid of Giza in his honour, the details surrounding the life and times of Khufu are somewhat incomplete. However, we do know that this pharaoh of the Fourth Dynasty was the second leader to rule in that dynasty during the Old Kingdom. The ancient historians who provide us with most of our information regarding Khufu often contradict one another as to the nature of his character – one interpretation presents him as an amicable figurehead who inspired the Great Pyramid, while another presents him as a vile man who prostituted his own daughter to make money.



Khafre

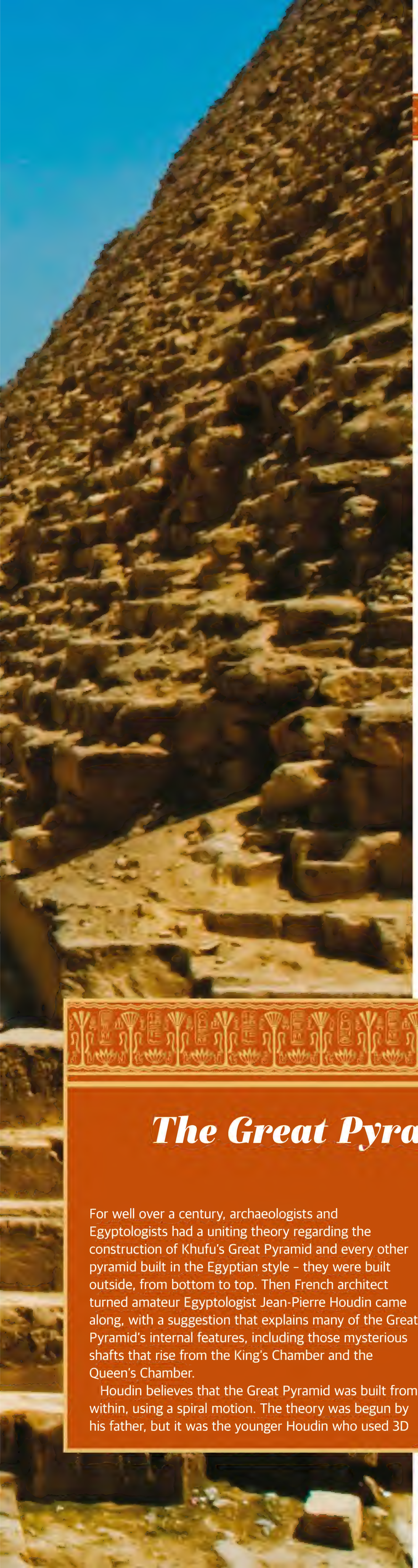
Much like his father Khufu, the fourth leader of the Fourth Dynasty was also a man who felt the calling to build something as grand and wondrous as the Great Pyramid. A man who married his sister Meresankh III (a common practice in Ancient Egypt – Khufu himself married his own sibling), Khafre typified his reign by the sheer productivity of his construction. He had the second of the great pyramids built in a nearby valley and had a grand causeway constructed to link the two. This causeway also connected up to the Great Sphinx, a structure many believe bears the features of Khafre himself.

Menkaure

Believed to be the son of Khafre, Menkaure was the fifth king of the Fourth Dynasty in Ancient Egypt. While accounts of both Khufu (his grandfather) and Khafre are mixed and often contradictory, historical depictions record the Egyptian leader as being pious and a strong and well-liked monarch. It was under his reign that the third and last of the Great Pyramids was constructed. It was, unfortunately, left incomplete at the time of his death but such was the goodwill felt by the people in his passing that his successor, Shepseskaf, oversaw the completion of the structure in his honour.

The Great Pyramid may look smooth from afar, but its exterior has a jagged, stepped pattern created by the blocks of stone used to build it

"The Great Pyramid and its grand neighbours remain one of man's most awe-inspiring achievements"



"We know that we are not the first to try, but with ScanPyramids we want to contribute to increasing the knowledge we have on the pyramids with humility," says Tayoubi on finding that balance between furthering our knowledge of Khufu's pyramid while blazing a path for the use of scanning in modern archaeology. "We don't know if we will find something, but our motivation is based on our passion and our childhood dreams. By using those techniques on the field we not only see the pyramids with a new perspective but we also give a new perspective to the technology that is making progress thanks to the magic of Egyptian heritage."

The Great Pyramid itself is mostly solid mass, and while it isn't the intricate network of chambers that films would have us believe, it does hold a handful of chambers built specifically for the pharaoh and his queen. Its only known interior spaces include the Descending Passage (the original entrance), the Ascending Passage, the Grand Gallery, a mysterious grotto, an equally mysterious subterranean chamber and the two main chambers. The two chambers, the King's Chamber and the Queen's Chamber are stacked on top of one another. Interestingly, a great deal of historians believe the Queen's Chamber never did, nor was it ever intended to, house a queen but simply represented the pharaoh's right to bear one both in life and in death.

So what of its contents? A tomb built for a king would surely be overflowing with riches to carry him to the afterlife? Sadly, the reality is far less glittering. In the ninth century, long after the death of Ancient Egypt, a young Arab caliph by the name of Abdullah Al Mamun thirsted for knowledge of the world. He wanted to map the lands beyond his kingdom and believed he would find the beginning of his destiny in the King's Chamber of the Great Pyramid at Giza. He and his men opened the tomb and entered the chamber, only to find it picked bare, with an equally empty coffin. It seems thieves had already had their way with the posthumous wealth of the once great pharaoh, and spirited away his earthly remains to boot.

It's a mystery that's bloomed ever since, branching out with even more questions and theories. Why would someone remove the body of a long dead king? Why are there no references to Khufu anywhere in the chamber? Was the Great Pyramid ever truly his? Such speculation has produced many a theory as to the true location of Khufu's body, including the possibility that his remains were removed by his priests (either those pledged to him shortly after his demise or those following the death cult that flourished in his name during the 24th Dynasty) in order to protect them from grave robbers and raiders. This theory – and it is only a theory, since we have no evidence to support or dismiss it – alludes to a potential second sacred site that remains untouched to this day.

One of the other popular theories suggests Khufu's remains are actually still in the Great Pyramid, surreptitiously contained within a secret chamber that's yet to be discovered. It's one of many possibilities that Mehdi Tayoubi and his team at ScanPyramids are hoping to investigate, with the help of others.

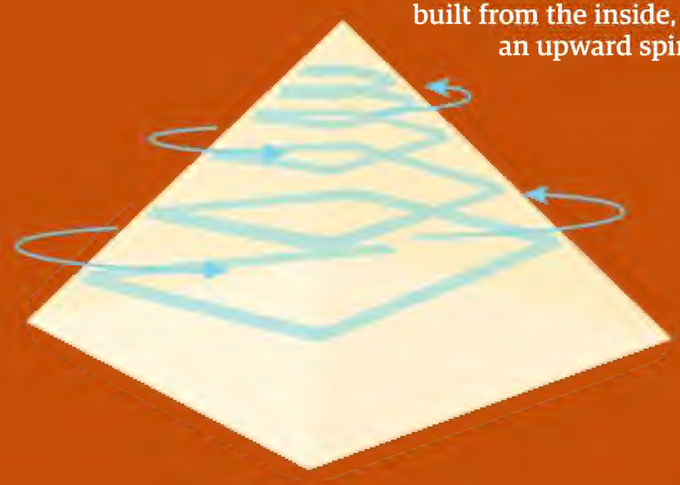
"Unfortunately, we're not archaeologists," admits Tayoubi. "Our scientific process is designed to scan the pyramids on a wide scale and is pushing the limits of the technology. If there is a void then other disciplines will tell us why this void exists through

The Great Pyramid and the Spiral Structure theory

For well over a century, archaeologists and Egyptologists had a uniting theory regarding the construction of Khufu's Great Pyramid and every other pyramid built in the Egyptian style – they were built outside, from bottom to top. Then French architect turned amateur Egyptologist Jean-Pierre Houdin came along, with a suggestion that explains many of the Great Pyramid's internal features, including those mysterious shafts that rise from the King's Chamber and the Queen's Chamber.

Houdin believes that the Great Pyramid was built from within, using a spiral motion. The theory was begun by his father, but it was the younger Houdin who used 3D software to create a model of the pyramid constructed via this 'Spiral Structure' theory.

The theory states that the first 30 per cent of the Great Pyramid was built using an external ramp, with a second ramp created within the structure to take it all the way to its pinnacle. This theory is supported by a surviving ramp that resides within the tomb and continues to form a crux of the concept. And those mysterious, sealed shafts that rise from two of the three burial chambers? Houdin and his fellow theorists believe they were created as a means of checking the structural integrity of the pyramid as it neared completion and were later filled in when such fears had been allayed.



Houdin's theory claims that the pyramid was built from the inside, in an upward spiral

Chambers of the Great Pyramid

The Great Pyramid is the centrepiece of the complex at Giza. The dominating landmark was constructed from over 2 million stone blocks, weighing between two and 15 tons each. It is the last standing, and the largest, of the seven ancient wonders of the world, and its existence gives us a glimpse into the vast empire of Ancient Egypt under King Khufu. This is the inside of the Pyramid as we know it now, but it is possible that the ScanPyramids team will find something new – particularly in light of the mysterious heat anomalies detected at the site in 2015.

King's Chamber

The location of King Khufu's body remains unknown. The most widely accepted theory is that his bed chamber was plundered by tomb raiders and his corpse removed.

Secret chambers?

Back in 2004, a pair of French amateur archeologists claimed they had found a secret chamber in the Great Pyramid, but the Egyptian government never granted them permission to proceed.

Queen's Chamber

The inside of the Pyramid contained three separate burial chambers. One was buried underground, the Queen's Chamber was above that and the King's Chamber on the top. The Queen's Chamber never actually housed a queen.

Vast resources

The resources required to build the Great Pyramid of Khufu were vast – around 2.3 million stone blocks were used to construct it and each one weighed up to 15 tons each.

GRAND GALLERY

VENTILATION SHAFTS

ANTECHAMBER

RELIEVING CHAMBERS

WELL SHAFT

ENTRANCE

Subterranean chamber

A great vessel (known as the 'solar ship') was excavated from the foot of the Great Pyramid in 1954 and remains the largest of its kind in the world.

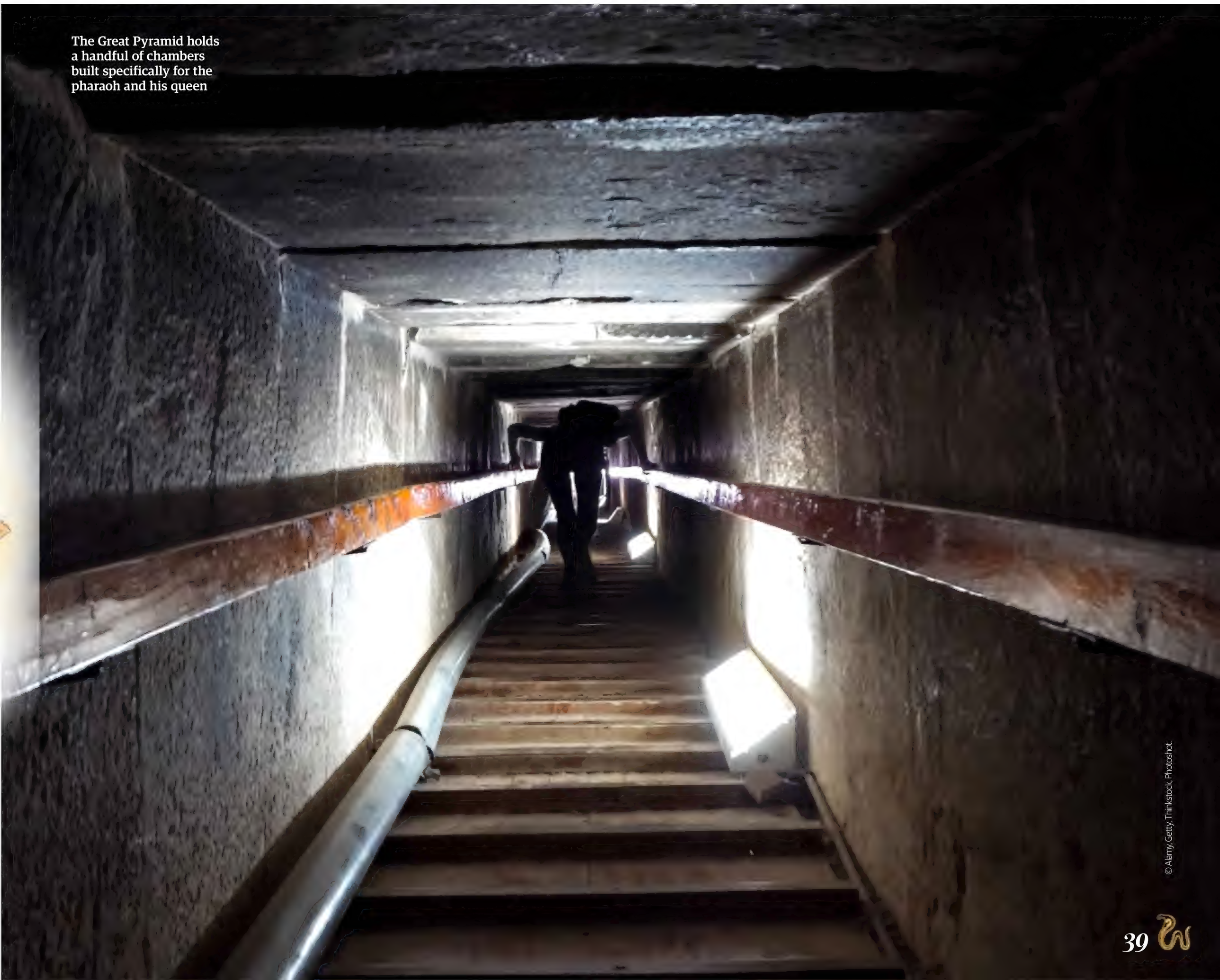
their historical architectural knowledge. We can compare our approach to what is happening when an Egyptologist asks a forensic scientist to look at a mummified body through a medical scanner. It's a collaborative process – if we can determine that no chambers contain any irregularities that could be perceived as a coffer, the search for Khufu can continue elsewhere. It's a mystery that no one discipline can solve."

That's not to say ScanPyramids is done with the Great Pyramid and the other two structures at Giza. Much like the rest of the archaeological community, the absence of concrete answers only fuels the desire to learn more. Take the strange heat anomalies that were discovered by a separate survey team back in 2015 – a new mystery to join the many that already exist.

Tayoubi and his team are focused on this new Great Pyramid conundrum as well. "We don't know quite what's causing these heat patches yet, but we are now working with the muons telescopes from the outside of the structure to better understand those areas," he adds. "We also run a multiple 24-hour infrared survey – our goal is to register for a long period the difference of temperatures to eliminate the effects of outside elements such as wind. This mission is about long-term statistics and measurements. The Great Pyramid may well have been built more than 4,000 years ago so a one year mission is really the minimum to better understand them."

And so Tayoubi is only looking to the future as ScanPyramids tries to refine and innovate as it continues to dissect the contents of what may or may not be Khufu's grand monument. "Our process is very cautious, and progress is only made step by step," he muses. "Each day we are making progress with the techniques needed to really understand this structure. For example, at the beginning of our time in Giza the chemical emulsion we used to scan with was only able to be exposed for a total of 40 days (mainly because of the humidity and temperature of the Egyptian air). Now we have a new emulsion that can be exposed for more than 60 days – now we can record more muon tracks and get more accurate muography images with more statistics."

So whether you travel to Giza as a tourist or an academic, the Great Pyramid and its grand neighbours remain one of man's most awe-inspiring achievements. Through its near eternal monuments, a long-dead culture continues to preside over its modern descendants like silent guardians. Whether the Great Pyramid truly was Khufu's final resting place or not, the murky political machinations of the past can't diminish the majesty of this wonder of the world.



The Great Pyramid holds a handful of chambers built specifically for the pharaoh and his queen

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A LAND DIVIDED

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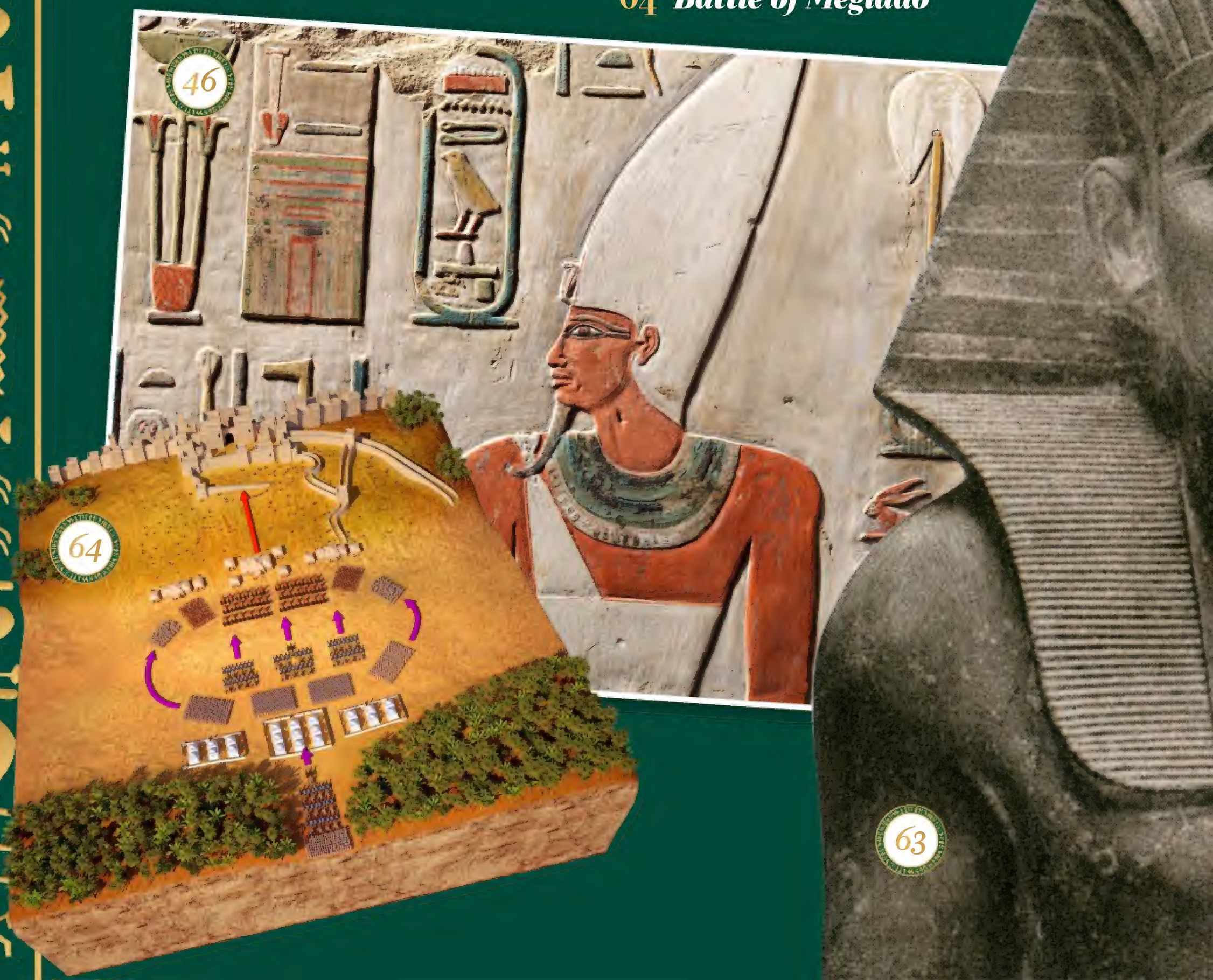

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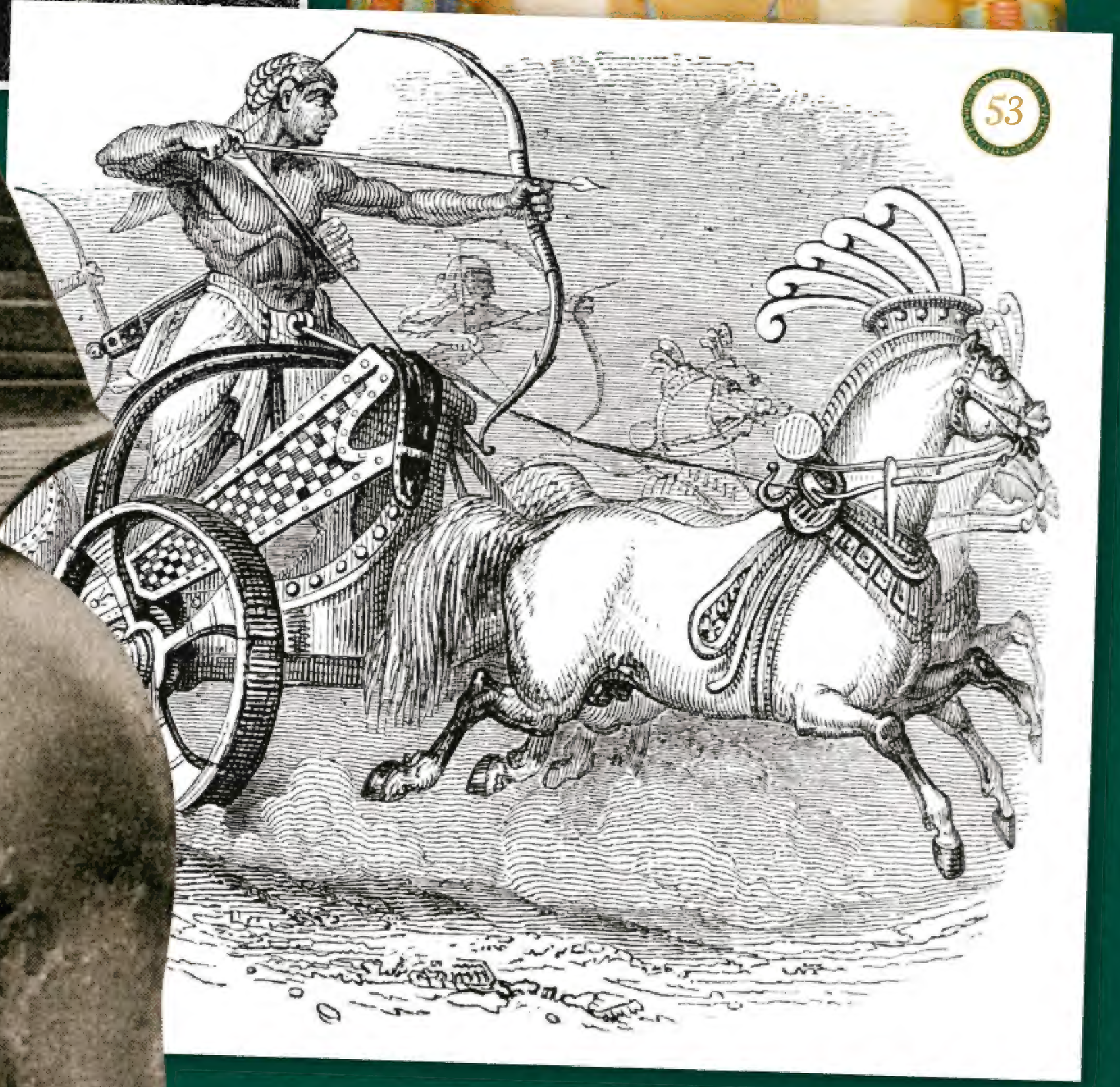
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MENTUHOTEP II

THE PHARAOH WHO REUNITED EGYPT

After the chaos and division following the fall of the Old Kingdom, a new dynasty worked to bring back order

Words by Edoardo Albert

Pharaoh Mentuhotep II not only reunified Egypt, creating the stability that led to the flourishing of the Middle Kingdom, often seen as a golden age in antiquity, he also features in the oldest surviving ghost story in the world. But first, the life and reign of Mentuhotep.

By around 2181 BCE the highly centralised Old Kingdom had collapsed into regional and local districts. Egyptologists generally divide Egyptian history into periods of organised central control, known as 'Kingdoms', and periods of political uncertainty and more local power, known as 'Periods'. The Old Kingdom gave way to the First Intermediate Period from around 2180 BCE to 2040 BCE. Memphis, the capital of the Old Kingdom, was no longer able to exert political control over the regional governors, called nomarchs, who each governed an area called a nome, so the nomarchs became, in effect, local kings and chieftains. The collapse of central control had the positive effect of spreading money and wealth much more widely through Egypt. The funerary cult of the pharaohs of the Old Kingdom funnelled huge resources to the tombs of the dead kings. With the collapse of the Old Kingdom, these resources became widely available throughout Egypt. For example, where before gardens, tombs and tomb inscriptions were the province only of the highest echelons of Egyptian society, by the end of the First Intermediate Period even quite ordinary people might hope to have their own guide books to the afterlife in the form of Coffin Texts. In effect, this meant that not just the pharaoh could hope for an afterlife.

"His reign was unusually long, in the region of 50 years"

The successors to the great pharaohs of the Old Kingdom abandoned their capital at Memphis and moved up the Nile to Heracleopolis - the name is Greek, deriving from Ptolemaic Egypt; in Demotic the town was called Child of the Pharaoh. From there they controlled the Nile Delta and Lower Egypt. Lower Egypt is actually to the north of Upper Egypt, as the designation refers to where the kingdoms lie on the River Nile. Meanwhile, up river, Intef I, the nomarch of the city of Thebes, began to expand his power by conquering the neighbouring nomes and founding a new dynasty, the 11th. The succeeding kings - four of them - gradually expanded the area under the

The sarcophagus of one of the pharaoh's secondary wives, or possibly a priestess of Hathor

Nome is derived from the Greek nomos, meaning a province or district. Nomarch is from the Greek word nomarchēs

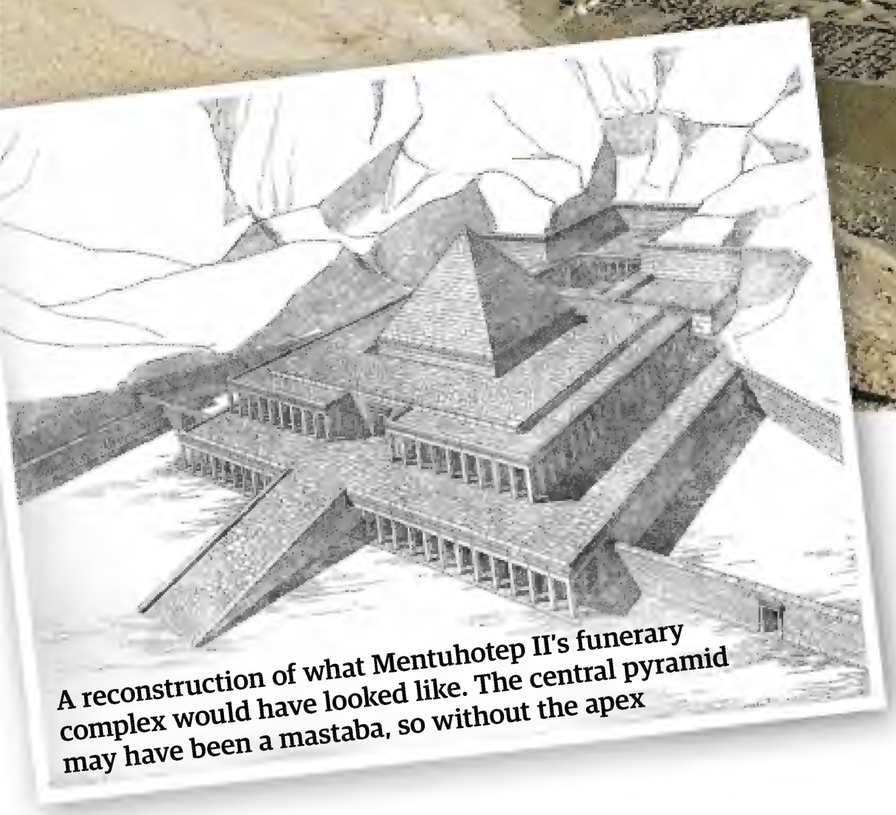
control of the 11th dynasty, the most significant conquest being the capture of the city of Abydos, the burial site of the earliest pharaohs. By conquering Abydos, the kings of the 11th dynasty were staking their claim to be the true successors of the pharaohs of old rather than the kings reigning in Heracleopolis.

This did not go down well with the kings in Heracleopolis. Although the evidence, so long after the events, is equivocal, there seems to have been a period of intermittent warfare between the kings of Heracleopolis, who claimed for themselves the mantle of being the successors to the pharaohs of the Old Kingdom, and the newly ambitious nomarchs of Thebes, who were now claiming for themselves the rulership of Egypt. Thebes, which had before been a minor town on the banks of the Nile, saw a huge programme of tomb and palace building as the successors to Intef I made their uniquely Egyptian play for the throne: by building bigger and better houses for their dead than anyone else.

But the living had their part to play too, and military expeditions against the Heracleopolitan kings had significantly weakened their position when, around 2055 BCE – all Egyptian chronology before the New

A sandstone sculpture of Pharaoh Mentuhotep II, now on display in the Metropolitan Museum of Art

The remains of the funerary complex of Mentuhotep



A reconstruction of what Mentuhotep II's funerary complex would have looked like. The central pyramid may have been a mastaba, so without the apex

Kingdom is conjectural, so you will see many different dates given for the reigns of the pharaohs of the Middle Kingdom – a new king ascended to the throne in Thebes that was now claiming rulership of Upper and Lower Egypt. His name was Mentuhotep.

Given that Mentuhotep's reign was unusually long, in the region of 50 years, it is likely that he acceded to the throne at a young age. The first 14 years of his reign appear to have passed in relative peace, with nothing surviving from the historical record to suggest widespread conflict. The young king seems to have been concerned to emphasise the legitimacy of his rule, for some of the surviving rock-carved reliefs depicting him give the distinct impression of a king protesting too much. The relief on the cliffs of the Wadi Shatt el-Rigal show a huge Mentuhotep towering over the three other figures carved with him: his putative father, Intef III; his mother; and the court official who served as chancellor to both men, Khety. Another relief at Tod shows another large Mentuhotep and his three royal predecessors, all called Intef, carved much smaller, all in a line behind him. Such insistence in stone of his royal lineage immediately suggests to suspicious historians a king whose legitimacy was less than secure: either Mentuhotep was not really a son of the royal line, or the kings at Heracleopolis were waging a propaganda campaign to delegitimise the new young king of Thebes.

If it was the latter, the campaign backfired badly on the Heracleopolitan kings. In the 14th year of his reign, possibly in response to an attack by the rival dynasty on Thinis, the as-yet-undiscovered capital city of the first dynasties of Egyptian rulers, Mentuhotep launched an assault on Lower Egypt and its rulers in Heracleopolis. Very little is known of the details of the conflict, but it ended with the collapse of the Heracleopolitan dynasty. The ruler of Heracleopolis, Merikare, died during the war before the two sides could meet in battle. In the midst of conflict, his successor was unable to cement his rule, and Mentuhotep was able to reunite, under his command, the divided kingdoms of Upper and

The pharaoh's great tomb

Mentuhotep built a 'House for Millions of Years' unlike any other

While Mentuhotep wanted to connect his rule to the pharaohs of the Old Kingdom, in one way he made a complete break with the past: his tomb. The huge mortuary complex he had built at Deir el-Bahri on the west bank of the Nile near Thebes is very different from the great pyramids of the first pharaohs. Surrounding the central structure were terraces and columned walkways, looking like verandahs on a pharaonic scale.

In front of the temple there were groves and rows of tamarisk and sycamore trees, each planted into holes cut 10m (33ft) into the rock that were then backfilled with soil and kept watered by the temple staff. There was a long causeway running to the upper terrace and the main building probably consisted of a square mastaba tomb – a pyramid with the top cut off, giving it a flat roof.

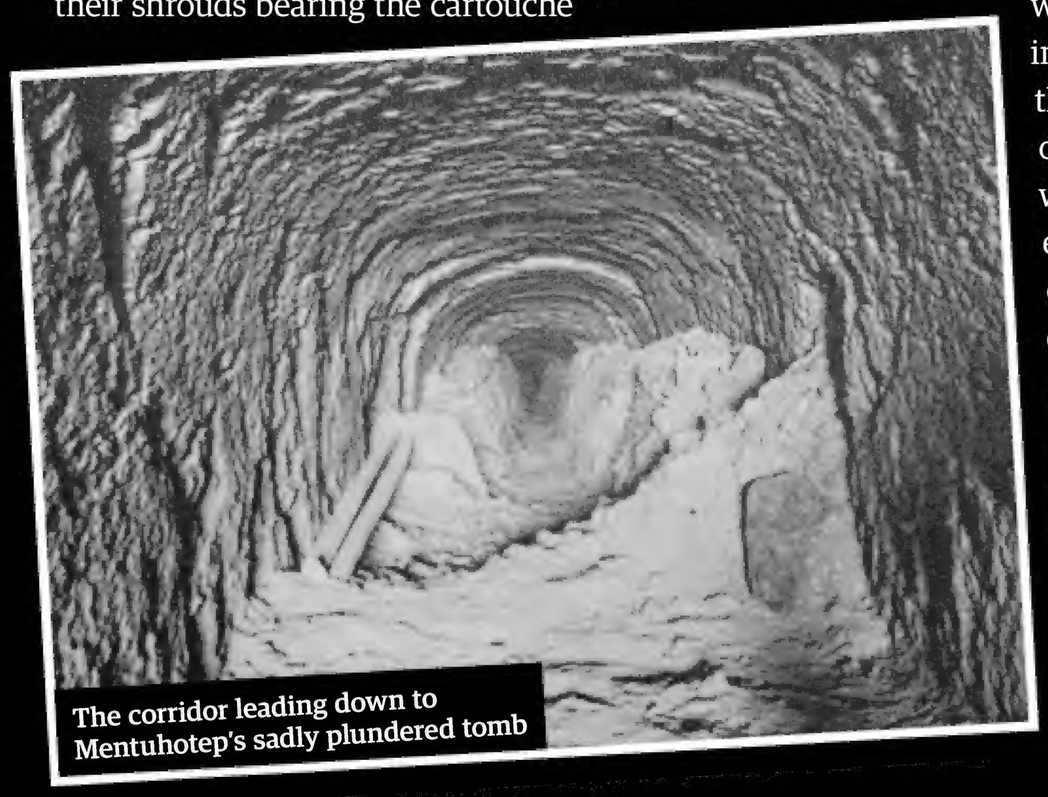
Mentuhotep was eventually buried there with two of his wives, Neferu and Tem, as well as six other women, four of them also called royal wives, although this could mean that they were priestesses of Hathor rather than wives of the pharaoh. These six women were of lower status than Neferu and Tem. Mentuhotep's own resting place was in a large chamber below the complex, but the riches of his tomb, along with the pharaoh himself, were lost to grave robbers centuries ago. We can only hope that, unlike the ghost of Nebusemekh, Pharaoh Mentuhotep's spirit can rest despite his tomb having been despoiled.

Mentuhotep's third titulary, 'He who unifies the two lands'

Lower Egypt. But while the course of the war is unclear, the bone-dry air at Deir el-Bahari on the west bank of the Nile has preserved a mute but all too telling testimony to the ferocity of the conflict. Deir el-Bahari was the site of Mentuhotep's own funerary complex, a vast undertaking that was built during the pharaoh's reign – the rulers of Egypt knew not to leave the security of their afterlife to their successors. Near the pharaoh's own planned tomb, archaeologists in the 1920s found a series of tunnels boring 60 metres (200 feet) into the cliff face. In these tunnels were the linen-wrapped but unmummified remains of 60 warriors. Although the bodies were not embalmed, the complete lack of humidity in the atmosphere led to the bodies drying, rather than rotting: the group of men are the best-preserved bodies from the Middle Kingdom. Buried within sight of the royal tomb, their shrouds bearing the cartouche of Mentuhotep, these bodies bear the marks of their dying: shattered and pierced skulls, arrows sticking out of bodies. The most likely explanation is that these men were soldiers of the war of Egyptian reunification that Mentuhotep waged against the Heracleopolitan dynasty, warriors who paid the price for the struggles of kings. But for Mentuhotep, they served both in life and in death; in life as men who helped him defeat the rival dynasty, and in death as heroes held up as examples of the service owed to the pharaoh. For Mentuhotep was now indeed pharaoh, the ruler of Upper and Lower Egypt.

Soldiers were equipped with many types of weapons. The most common Egyptian weapon was the bow and arrow

We do not know how long it actually took Mentuhotep to unite Egypt after the defeat of the Heracleopolitan kings, nor how difficult and bloody a process it was. But that these were violent and insecure times is indicated by the number of ordinary men who had weapons buried with them in their tombs. Egyptians expected the next life to be a continuation of this life, so being buried with weapons suggested a life experience of war. Many court officials were also depicted carrying weapons rather than the regalia of office. However, as Mentuhotep's long reign continued, cemetery goods and official portraits became gradually more peaceful, suggesting a return to political stability.



The corridor leading down to Mentuhotep's sadly plundered tomb

A painted sandstone sculpture of Mentuhotep II, now on display at the Cairo Museum

Mentuhotep II as depicted in his funerary complex at Deir el-Bahri

But being pharaoh was not enough for Mentuhotep: he would be divine. Throughout his reign, there was an increasing emphasis on his place among the gods. Mentuhotep was called 'son of Hathor', and he was depicted wearing the head gear of the gods Amun and Min; elsewhere he was represented as ithyphallic Min – 'ithyphallic' is a word worth looking up if you don't know what it means! There is every indication that Mentuhotep built his mortuary complex, his 'House of Millions of Years', expecting it to be used as the centre of a cult of worship for himself. In this, he anticipated the religious developments of the New Kingdom. The pharaoh changed his titulary, his official title that served as a statement of the king's aims, twice during his reign, becoming the 'divine one of the white crown' and then 'he who unifies the two lands'.

From his capital at Thebes, Mentuhotep curtailed the power of the nomarchs, retaining those who had supported him in his war against the Heracleopolitan dynasty and doing away with those who had fought against him. However, even the nomarchs who survived this cull could expect royal officials conducting inspections much more often than before. These officials travelled widely. Khety, the chancellor, looked after Sinai and Aswan, and Henenu, 'overseer of horn, hoof, feather and scale', travelled to Lebanon to fetch cedar wood for his king.

That Mentuhotep's achievement in reuniting Egypt made a deep mark on Egyptian society and memory is reflected in the fact that many private tombs, up as far as the 20th Dynasty, bore inscriptions in memory of the man who had unified Egypt once again following the turmoil after the fall of the Old Kingdom.

As for the ghost story, it was found written on ostraca – that is pottery inscribed with writing, dating from the New Kingdom. It tells a story of the time of Pharaoh Mentuhotep II and is believed

"Mentuhotep's achievement in reuniting Egypt made a deep mark on Egyptian society and memory"

An aerial view of Mentuhotep's funerary complex

to date from his reign, making the story around 4,000 years old. In the tale, found on four bits of ostraca around Deir el-Medina, Khonsemhab, a high priest of the god Amun, is visited by a restless ghost named Nebusemekh, who laments to the priest that his tomb has fallen into ruin, that no one brings him food any longer and that, if this continues, then he will be lost, ceasing to exist for his soul no longer has a dwelling place. Khonsemhab asks the ghost who he was and Nebusemekh tells him that he had been in charge of the treasury of Mentuhotep and lieutenant in his army. Dying in the 14th year of his reign, the pharaoh had provided his faithful servant with all the necessities for the afterlife, but now the care due to him has withered away, and he is withering too. The high priest Khonsemhab assures the ghost that he will see to the care of his tomb, but Nebusemekh is dubious: he thinks the priest simply doesn't have the money to build him a new tomb or to supply enough victuals to sustain him. But Khonsemhab does not forget his promise, and sends men out to search for the tomb of Nebusemekh. They return with news of its whereabouts, at which Khonsemhab rejoices, calling an official to tell him what he has found.

> Mentuhotep II was considered by his subjects to be divine, or half divine, following the reunification

Unfortunately the end of the story is lost – although there is hope that another piece of ostraca may be unearthed with its ending – but experts believe that in the story Khonsemhab goes to the ruined tomb to tell the ghost of Nebusemekh that he will soon have a new home. Of all its themes, the story tells most clearly of the hopes and fears that unite us to people who lived lives so many thousands of years ago in a time so unlike our own, yet who feared abandonment and loss, and felt the calls of obligation and duty just as we do. It's a remarkable testament to human unity over time.

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WARRIORS OF THE PHARAOH

The Egyptian military charted a course of steady evolution during the age of the pharaohs

Words by David Smith

The Ancient Egyptians faced many foes during their long history, including the Hyksos, the Hittites and the 'Sea Peoples', all of which stimulated advancements in military technology. In the period of the Old Kingdom, the Egyptian army was comprised of locally raised militia, with a hard kernel of mercenary troops. Exclusively infantry, the soldiers wore no armour and their primary weapon was the spear. Central control broke down at the end of the period, but was re-established during the Middle Kingdom. The army began to use Nubian archers, and later raised them within Egypt itself.

Hemmed in by natural barriers – the desert, the Mediterranean and the Red Sea – the Egyptians were mostly concerned with staving off threats from the desert tribes and the Nubians to the south. A 'forward policy' emerged, by which the Egyptians pushed aggressively into neighbouring territories, and this evolved until the Egyptians were campaigning in Syria, Palestine, Libya, Nubia and the Kush (Ethiopia). The pharaoh's status as a warrior king became of paramount importance.

During the New Kingdom period, Egyptian military might reached its zenith, with war chariots and siegecraft increasingly important, although the use of actual siege engines appears to have been limited.

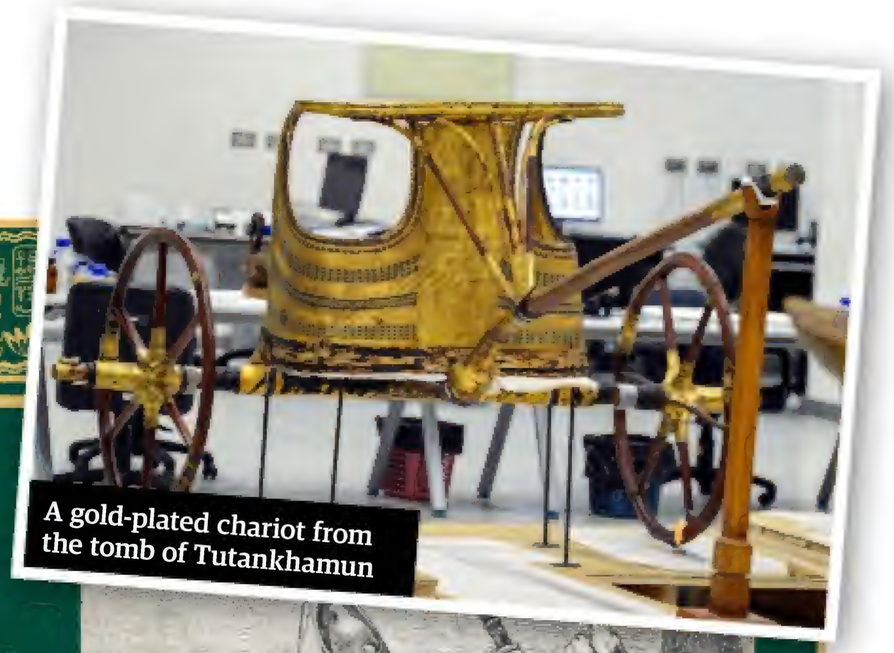
Charioteers

Chariots were not a traditional part of the Egyptian army until they encountered them in their expeditions into Asia, along with other new military technologies. The Egyptians of the Old and Middle Kingdoms did not even make much use of horses, except for scouting and delivering messages.

The Hyksos invasion of Egypt, which resulted in them gaining control over areas in the eastern delta, was originally thought to have been facilitated by the widespread use of chariots, but that is now disputed. What is clear is that the Egyptians learned about chariots and quickly embraced the concept. Steady improvements in design – the wheels were at first solid, then made with four spokes and later with six – made chariots sturdier and faster, but they remained primarily a missile platform in the Egyptian army.

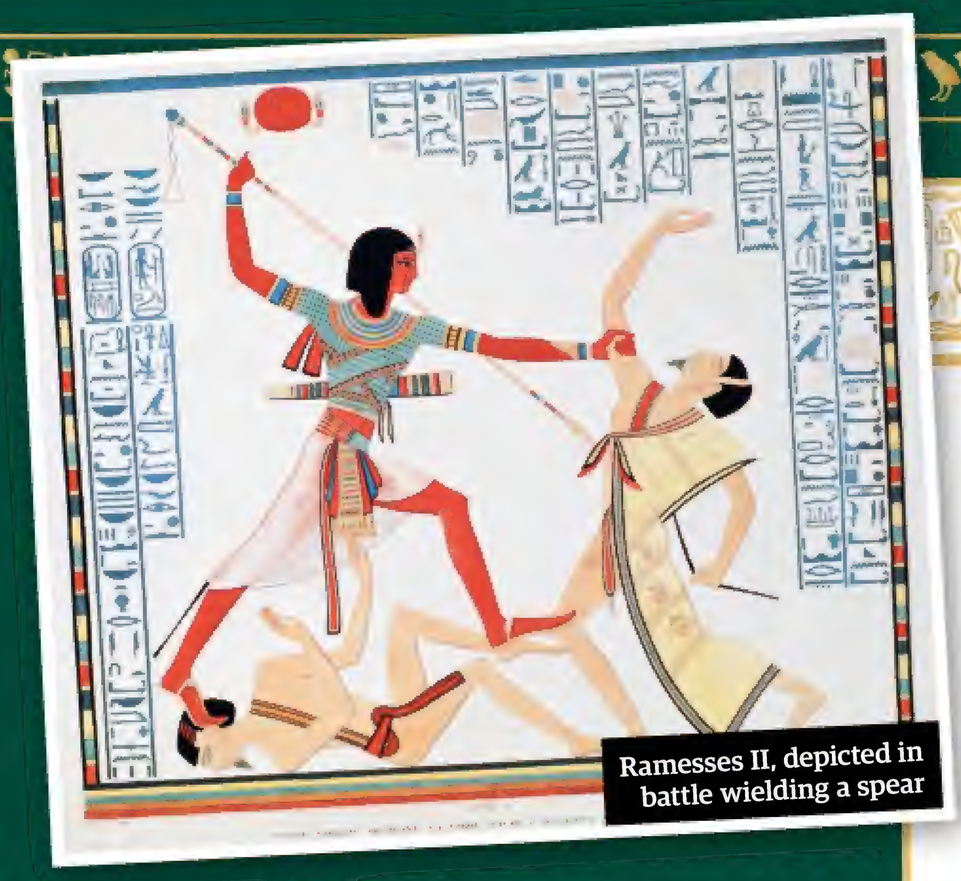
This contrasted with the use of chariots by other peoples. The Hittites, for example, manned heavy chariots with three men – a driver and two spear-wielding troops. For the Egyptians, two-man crews in a lighter chariot worked best, with a driver and an archer teaming up. Thousands of these chariots could harass an enemy effectively from a safe distance, and by the time of the New Kingdom, arrowheads were bronze rather than the original flint.

The chariot soon became the most prestigious element on the battlefield, and pharaohs are often depicted wielding a bow from a chariot. The gold-plated example found in the tomb of Tutankhamun confirms that they were highly regarded symbols of military prowess.



A gold-plated chariot from the tomb of Tutankhamun

Ramsses II in action at Kadesh, during which he supposedly attacked the Hittites single-handedly


Ramesses II, depicted in battle wielding a spear

Weaponry

The heavy spear was the main weapon throughout the different phases of the Egyptian army. It was used as a thrusting weapon rather than being thrown like a javelin, and used in conjunction with a wide, wooden shield. Spearheads were originally flint or copper, becoming bronze in later periods.

Heavy infantry would advance towards an enemy in formation, presenting a wall of shields over which the spears could be thrust. This should not be mistaken for the highly disciplined use of shields and spears in the Greek phalanx tactics, however – Egyptian spears were far shorter. A shield would typically be about 85cm (33in) in length, and heavily decorated ceremonial shields were often buried with pharaohs and other dignitaries. They were also carried by chariot drivers.

Axes were an important secondary weapon, and a variety of axehead designs were developed. Strictly a close-range weapon, a bronze axehead would be affixed to a wooden pole and used in a slashing motion.

Bows were originally made from animal horn, then wood, and the composite design had been adopted by the time of the New Kingdom – again, it was introduced by the Hyksos. This design added range and power, but made the weapon harder to wield, so simpler bows never fell out of use completely.

Egyptian heavy infantry marching in formation

Infantry

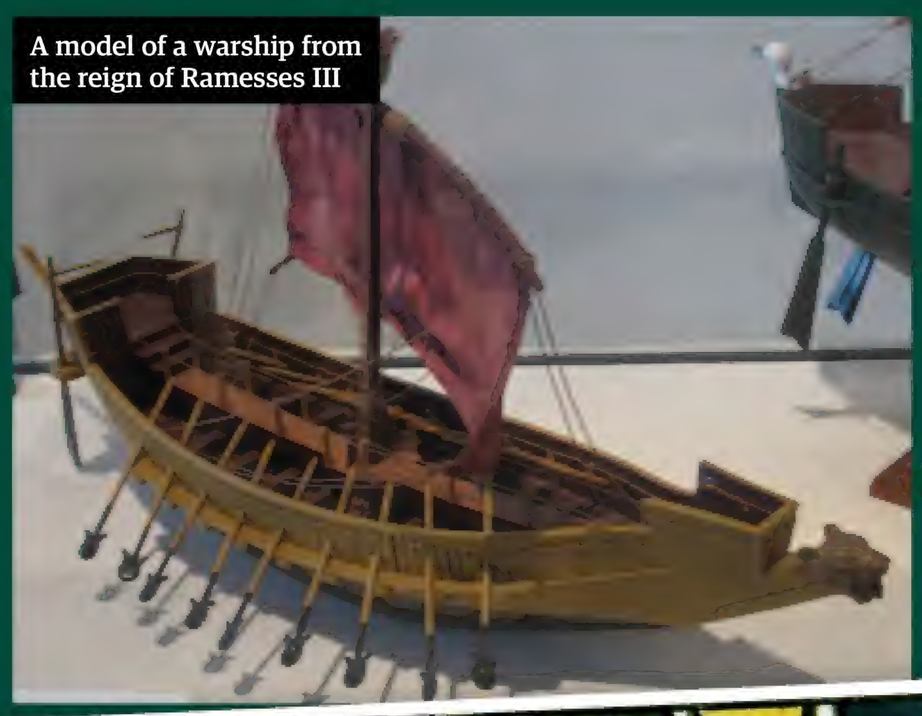
During the New Kingdom, the Egyptian military became a far more organised and effective fighting force. Nowhere was this more apparent than within the ranks of the infantry. By the time of Ramesses II this was a highly sophisticated arm. Troops were divided into divisions of around 5,000 men. In the army Ramesses took into battle at Kadesh, he had four such divisions, named 'Amun', 'Ra', 'Ptah' and 'Sutekh'. Each division was divided into 20 companies of 250 men each, with further divisions down to platoons of 50. Platoons were commanded by the 'great ones of the fifty'.

The heavy infantry wore no armour, but carried large shields and had spears as their main weapon, along with axes and swords. Complementing the heavy foot soldiers were archers, by now recruited in Egypt and armed with composite bows. Their job was to disrupt the enemy from a distance while the heavy infantry formations closed to engage. Archers often went into battle on chariots, enabling them to keep their distance from the enemy. If forced to fight, they had small shields and daggers.

There was a solid logistical system to keep the men and horses fed and watered, including a sizeable baggage train and supply ships.

Models of Egyptian heavy infantry from the 18th Dynasty

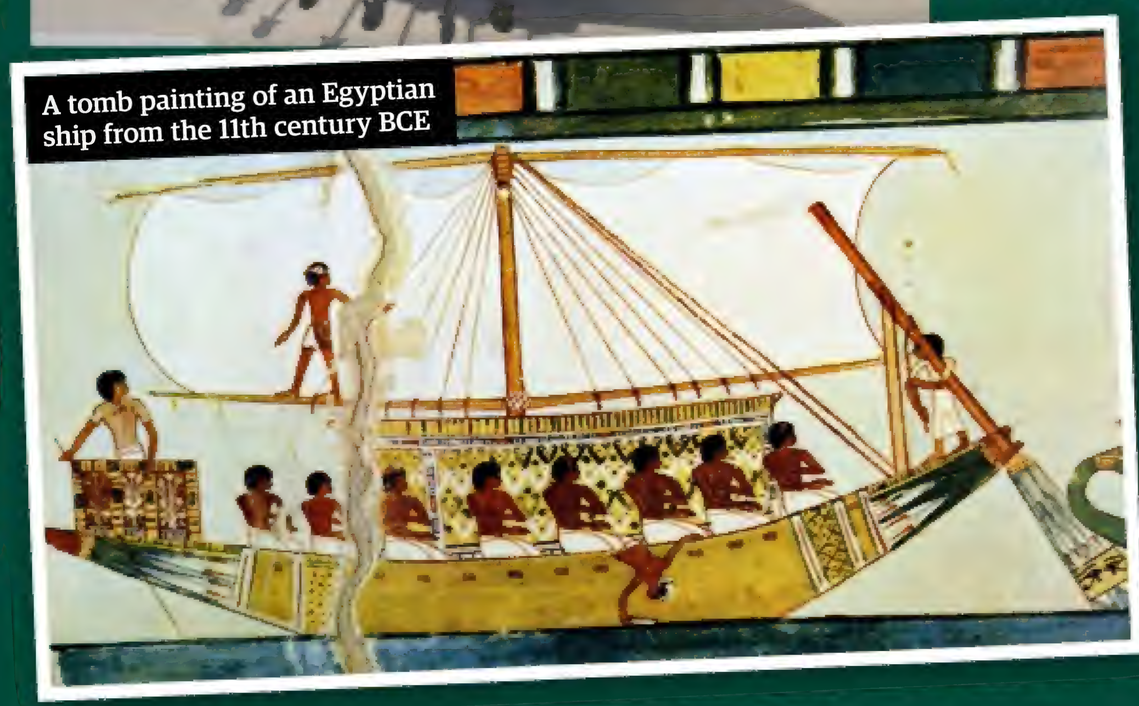
A piece from a New Kingdom relief shows an archer with his bow


A model of a warship from the reign of Ramesses III

Navy

The Egyptian navy was originally limited mainly to use on the Nile, but it did serve a function as a supply and transportation arm. It was never considered separate from the army itself. Ships could either be made from reeds or from wooden planks, the latter being more suited to engaging in battle. Slaves would sit below deck to man a bank of oars, while infantry and archers would fight from the deck, either at a distance or by closing and boarding an enemy vessel.

During the reign of Ramesses III, Egypt was threatened by the 'Sea Peoples', and naval engagements were fought in which the Egyptians appear to have won through superior tactics, despite having inferior ship designs. In an echo of Egypt's chariot tactics, they employed lighter ships to harass the enemy from a distance, peppering them with fire from bows and slingshots.


A tomb painting of an Egyptian ship from the 11th century BCE

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AHMOSE I
A UNIFYING POWER

After years of unrest, one king would defy invaders, unify a kingdom, found a dynasty and organise the construction of the last ever natively built pyramid

Words by Dom Reseigh-Lincoln

Think of Ancient Egypt and you might very well imagine a vast empire ruled by god-fearing monarchs; men and women who erected grand tombs and monuments in their honour. But that stereotypical snapshot of the Nile kings is only half the story - for every peaceful period of absolute rule, there was a time when Egypt was divided or controlled almost entirely by foreign powers. Ahmose I, who was the founding king of the 18th Dynasty, was born into such a time. The kingdom he was destined to inherit was bisected by invaders who had dominated Lower Egypt for over a century. And it would be his defence of this long-standing status quo that would define his position as one of Ancient Egypt's most celebrated leaders.

To appreciate the gravity of Ahmose I's actions at the beginning of the 18th Dynasty, and the effect it would have on the country for centuries to come, you have to travel back to the reign of his father, Seqenenre Tao. Tao ruled from 1560 BCE to 1558 BCE, but his time on the throne, like many before him, was blighted by an occupying force to the north of the country. Around 1720 BCE, a nation of Semitic tradesman and warriors from Asia known as the Hyksos had invaded and occupied the Nile Delta, establishing a separate realm to the rest of Egypt. The collapse of the 13th and 14th Dynasties in the south gave this tribe all it needed to take root in the region. By 1650 BCE, the Hyksos had grown strong enough to establish its own dynasty, considered the 15th, with the noble Salitis assuming the title of king in the newly established Hyksos capital of Avaris.

The Hyksos didn't rule their newly acquired land with an iron first either - if anything, their presence in northern Egypt actively benefited the region and its people. They brought with them new tools and foods, as well as opening that corner of Egypt up to the bountiful trade routes of Asia. Their arrival was a gradual one; with Egypt's fragmented political system allowing foreign traders and tribes to travel through the region with relative ease, it was inevitable that a warrior tribe such as the Hyksos would eventually settle there. The fact they brought with them chariots and compound bows, both advanced weaponry for the time, made them all the more formidable.

> Ahmose I had many children with his wife and sister, Ahmose-Nefertari. Two of their sons (Sapair and Saamen) died young

A counter dynasty was established in Thebes in the vacuum left by the plague-ravaged 14th Dynasty, and it was from this line that Ahmose I's family rose. By the time his father Tao came to power, the kings in Thebes were already trying to drive out their hostile neighbours. Tao taunted the Hyksos, refusing to pay tribute, and led a number of military campaigns into Lower Egypt - however, considering the severe head trauma to his mummy, it's believed he likely died in one of these campaigns. The throne passed to his eldest son Kamose, who continued the war against the Hyksos. Kamose was successful in

Ahmose I

Little remains of Ahmose's single pyramid, but we do know it was around 6.5m² (70ft²) in size when completed

Ahmose I's mummy

Like many of the kings and queens who were preserved in grand tombs of the era, Ahmose I's mummy provides a fascinating insight into the physiological features of Egypt's most powerful leaders. Originally thought to be the body of a 50-year-old man, later studies suggest he died in his 30s. However, some clues – such as a lack of similar physical characteristics and the fact his arms weren't crossed on his chest, as per the tradition – suggest the remains may not even be those of Ahmose I.

The state of his remains also reveals an intriguing post-mortem history. His tomb was discovered in 1881 within the Deir el-Bahri (a complex network of mortuary temples located in the Theban Necropolis) alongside fellow 18th Dynasty monarchs such as Amenhotep I and Thutmose I, but it's believed his body was originally interred at Dra' Abu el-Naga (located nearby on the West Bank of the Nile).

So why was his body moved from one necropolis to another? The strips of cloth wrapped around a mummified body are often marked with hieratic script to denote the high-ranking individual and his family, but the cloth surrounding Ahmose I's body contained his name and that of a monarch who ruled Egypt 400 years later – the priest-king Pinedjem II. It's believed Pinedjem II's family moved Ahmose I's remains to join the future king because his tomb had been plundered by thieves.

Statues were often built from sandstone. This one is possibly of Ahmose I

> *"Ahmose's military ethos was simple: attack the Hyksos relentlessly. Grind them down. Burn their fortresses"*

driving the Hyksos further into Lower Egypt, but he died five years into his reign.

Ahmose I inherited the throne at the tender age of ten, but with Thebes now at war with Lower Egypt, control of the country instead passed to his mother Ahhotep. While acting as regent, Ahmose I's mother is recorded as Ahhotep I, suggesting she officially took the role of queen in the interim. During this time, Ahhotep consolidated power in Thebes, uniting disenfranchised members of the Egyptian court in order to strengthen the kingdom for the campaigns to come.

By the time Ahmose I came of age and continued his father and brother's offensives against the Hyksos, the conflict had been raging for roughly three decades. After centuries of isolated rule without challenge or interference from the outside world, Egypt was now a polarised nation. It also galvanised Egypt's elite to become more actively involved in the machinations of their kingdoms and the political make-up of the wider world. Ahmose I was the blueprint for the change in mindset. He, like his brother and father, realised that the Hyksos' superior weaponry gave them the advantage, as did their fortresses along the border between the two kingdoms.

> Ahmose was a follower of the god Amen and dedicated many military victories to him (a trend followed by many later pharaohs)

Ahmose's military ethos was simple: attack the Hyksos relentlessly. Grind them down. Burn their fortresses. Destroy their settlements and drive them out of the Delta. Around three campaigns were led by Ahmose, each one slowly pushing the Semitic warriors further and further back. He wisely cut off the Hyksos' capital, Avaris, from outside intervention and eventually took the Horus Road and the city itself. The offensive went on for many years and was a bloody affair, as all wars are, but eventually the usurpers were sent over the border back into what we know now as Palestine and Syria.

Ahmose I's conquest of the Hyksos signalled the end of foreign occupation and the beginning of the country's unification. The Egyptian king could see his nation was a pale imitation of former glories and was in dire need of reorganisation and rejuvenation. He continued his military excursions with haste, keen to re-establish Egypt's once far-reaching hold. After chasing the Hyksos back into Syria, he continued operations there, likely burning their bases and acquiring land and territory. He also

Defining moment

The 18th Dynasty established
1539 BCE

Interestingly, the beginning of the 18th Dynasty (with Ahmose I as its first pharaoh) wasn't officially established until after Ahmose successfully drove the Hyksos out of Egypt around 1520 BCE – however, like many dynasties, its official numbering was established retroactively. The victory of the Hyksos and the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt was deemed a worthy enough achievement to warrant the dawning of a new era. As such, the beginning of Ahmose I's reign is considered to be the start of the 18th Dynasty.

Timeline

1720 BCE

Hyksos invade
Asian traders and warriors occupy the Nile Delta, establishing a separate realm to the rest of Egypt. This eventually expands to cover the entirety of Lower Egypt.
1720 BCE

Kamose dies
Ahmose I's brother dies of unknown causes – the throne eventually passes to his younger brother, who is now ten years of age.
1550 BCE

Ahhotep becomes regent
Since Ahmose is still too young to rule by himself, de facto control of Upper Egypt falls to his mother Ahhotep. A popular individual, she maintains the attacks against the Hyksos.
1550-1539 BCE

Ahmose I marries Ahmose-Nefertari
As is the tradition, Ahmose I marries a number of his sisters. Ahmose-Nefertari is made his Chief Wife – he also weds sisters Ahmose-Sitkamose and Ahmose-Henuttamehu.
1537 BCE

Campaign against Hyksos
It is around this time that Ahmose I officially begins coordinating military campaigns against the Hyksos. Khamudi is the established king in Lower Egypt.
1532 BCE

Tjaru falls
In the early months of Ahmose I's campaign against the Hyksos, his forces take control of the fortress Tjaru, effectively cutting off the Hyksos capital of Avaris from the Hyksos homeland, Canaan.
1532 BCE

pushed further into Nubia, showing an aggressive new attitude to foreign relations.

Ahmose I's bold leadership was ushering in a new era for Egypt. The Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period eras, riddled with political in-fighting and foreign occupation, was over; the New Kingdom was here and Ahmose was determined to rebuild the country's glory. The reunified north brought with it new artistic and architectural techniques, including advances such as glass blowing. The arts thrived under Ahmose, with pottery and other forms of expression filling the streets of Thebes and the wider kingdom. Ahmose's expansive campaigns brought wealth back into Egypt, which he put to good use, building new temples and starting construction on a new pyramid – one he hoped would rival the great structures in Giza.

Thebes itself was also a key component of Ahmose's new vision for Europe. He started by making the city his capital – a simple choice considering it was his family's home. Thebes had also been the country's cultural and spiritual epicentre during the prosperous age of the Middle Kingdom, so the locale had considerable historical value for Ahmose I, a man who was desperate to rekindle those glory days, even purely by association. Finally, Thebes' geographical location had an impact on its new status as capital; being situated in the middle of the newly unified nation afforded the city a little more protection from a potential reinvasion by the Hyksos, as well as providing enough distance to monitor the Nubians to the south.

'Ahmose' translates roughly from Ancient Egyptian into 'The Moon is born' or 'The child of the Moon'

Ahmose I is also famous for being the last Egyptian monarch to have a pyramid erected on native soil. With one foot planted in the golden years of his kingdom's past, Ahmose I desired a prosperous new age for his people. His successes overseas had boosted the economy and he wanted to express it in the most lavish way possible, with a pyramid. It would be a monument to his life and achievements, and would stand for all time in his homeland.

Ahmose's pyramid wasn't built as a tomb, but rather a cenotaph (a purely ceremonial monument). It was built near Thebes, in what we now know as Abydos, and was completed in the final years of his reign. It was constructed from sand and rubble, as was the tradition of the time, with limestone used as a casing to hold the pyramid in place. When completed, it had a base length of around 52.5 metres (172 feet) and a height of 40 metres (130 feet). While considerably smaller than the grandest of tombs elsewhere in the country (the Pyramid of Giza stands at a colossal 130 metres (427 feet)), it would have still been an impressive sight among the temples of Thebes. Tragically, the pyramid didn't survive; it was mostly stripped of its precious limestone for other buildings in the years after Ahmose's death and the rest of the construct soon crumbled. Only a pile of rubble 10 metres (33 feet) high remains where it once stood.

Like many pharaohs, the date of Ahmose's death isn't certain, but the most common theory cites 1525 BCE. Yet it's a testament to the impact he had on Ancient Egypt in life, that the nature of his death hardly mattered – unlike other pharaohs.

Khamudi: the last ruler of the 15th Dynasty

While it would be his father, Apepi, who first began defending the Hyksos-controlled Lower Egypt against the newly renewed Theban court, it would fall to Khamudi to fight the greatest challenge to their occupation (and ultimately fail). But who was this usurper king, the last of the self-appointed 15th Dynasty to rule over half of Ancient Egypt?

The man named Khamudi remains one of the greatest mysteries of the 15th Dynasty, mainly due to the brevity of his reign. A number of historians, including Egyptologist Kim Ryholt, suggest his rule lasted barely a year compared to the four decades of his father. Other historians, including Donald Redford and Dr Aidan Dodson, subscribe to the theory that Khamudi's reign lasted around ten to 12 years. We do know that Khamudi had evacuated most of his people from the Hyksos capital of Avaris prior to the last and most violent siege of Ahmose I, however it's unknown whether the Semitic ruler died in the siege or fled to Syria/Palestine with the rest of the refugees. A single monument – an obelisk – attributed to his reign remains in Avaris.

Defining moment

The kingdom expands
1528-1525 BCE

After driving the Hyksos back into Syria and Palestine, Ahmose begins expanding the newly unified Egypt exponentially. To the north, he chases the Hyksos, destroying fortresses far beyond the Egyptian borders. Some historians argue that Ahmose was actively hunting the Semitic invaders down, while others prefer the theory that he was simply fortifying his own borders. During this 22nd year of his sovereignty, Ahmose pushed as far as the Eastern Mediterranean. He also conducted a number of campaigns in Nubia (modern-day northern Sudan) to the south.

Defining moment

Ahmose dies
1525 BCE

Unlike his brother, Ahmose I's reign over Egypt isn't short-lived – in fact, he ends up ruling the country for around 25 years before dying at the age of 35. The cause of death is unknown, but by the time the throne passes to his son, Amenhotep I, Egypt has prospered. Successful military campaigns and renewed trade with neighbouring nations have brought wealth and new commerce to the country, while a renaissance in the arts (including architecture and textiles) sees Egypt rejuvenated with new temples and sites of tribute to the god Amun.

Ahmose I takes Avaris
Between the 18th and 19th years of his reign, the Hyksos capital of Avaris finally falls. By controlling this city, the Theban ruler drives the invaders towards Canaan.
1529-1528 BCE

The heir apparent dies
Initially, the young Ahmose-ankh is deemed Ahmose I's successor, but he dies, so the line of succession instead turns to his eldest son, Amenhotep.
1531-1526 BCE

The pyramid rises
Ahmose commissions a new pyramid, the first in centuries, to be erected at Abydos. It's smaller than other pyramids by completion, but is still an impressive sight from Thebes.
1528 BCE

1525 BCE

© Alamy

HATSHEPSUT
THE QUEEN WHO BECAME KING

After decades of stability, Egypt once again found itself in crisis when one woman decided to shatter the status quo

Words by Alicea Francis

Some of the most powerful individuals of the ancient world, the pharaohs of Egypt were believed to have inherited the throne by divine right and were worshipped as gods on earth. Huge temples were built in their honour, statues were carved in their image and pyramids were built in their memory to ensure their everlasting legacy. However, in what may be one of history's biggest cover-up operations, one of its greatest rulers has been all but lost to the desert. And the reason behind this monarch's reign being erased from history might seem pretty trivial to us now: this pharaoh was a woman.

In the 16th century BCE, Egypt was experiencing a time of great stability. Founded by Ahmose I in 1543 BCE, the 18th Dynasty marked the start of an era when the empire reached the peak of its power. Once Ahmose had expelled the Hyksos settlers from Lower Egypt and brought the Nile Delta under his control, the nation was politically unified for the first time in more than 500 years. Ahmose reorganised the country's administration and undertook huge construction projects, which were continued when his successor, Amenhotep I, took the throne in 1526 BCE. It was a time of great strength and stability.

> Hatshepsut was the longest reigning female pharaoh of Egyptian descent, with a rule spanning around 22 years

Then came the reign of Thutmose I from 1506-1493 BCE, who extended the empire's borders further than ever before. When he died, the throne was passed to his son, Thutmose II, who was born to him by one of his minor wives. To secure his kingship, Thutmose II was married to his half-sister, the daughter of Thutmose I. She was of fully royal blood and declared his chief wife. Her name was Hatshepsut.

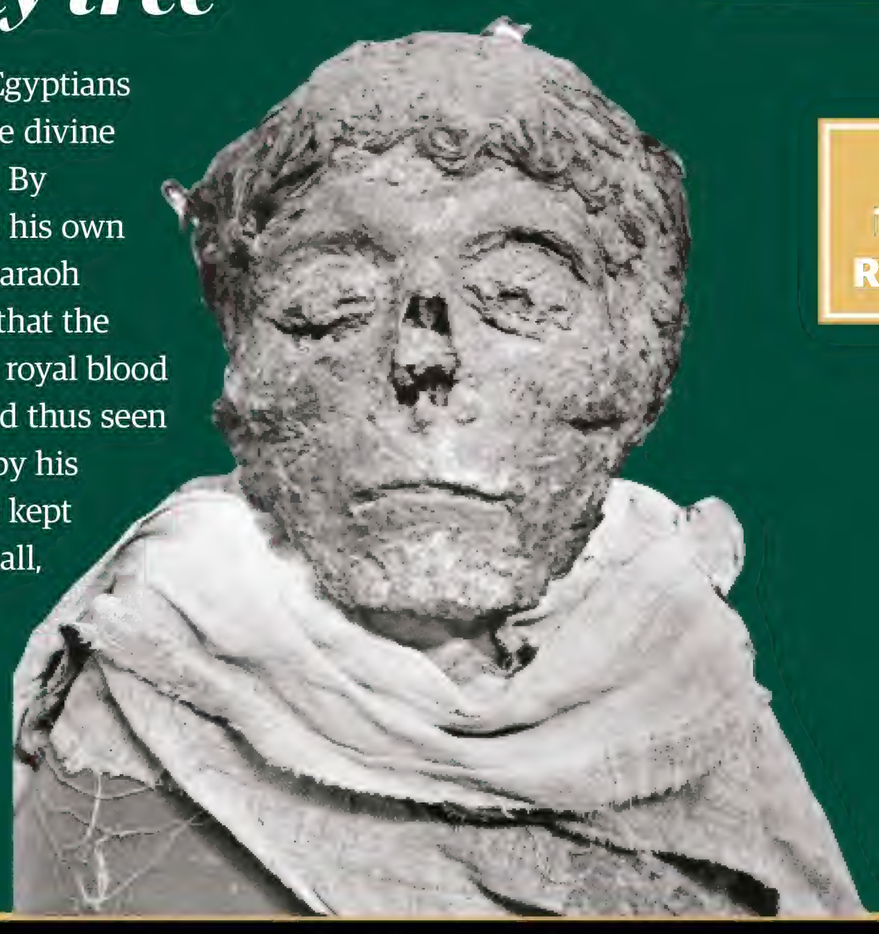
Even at the tender age of 12, Hatshepsut already held a great deal of influence in the royal court. It is likely that Thutmose II was even younger than her, so his wife took the reins when it came to making decisions on both foreign and domestic policy. Her husband was physically frail too, as his thin and scab-riddled mummy would reveal, and he ruled for no longer than 13 years before dying in his 20s. Hatshepsut had given so much during his short reign, but she had been unable provide Thutmose with the one thing he would need to continue his dynasty: a male heir.

Instead, the throne was passed to a son by a woman of his harem. The boy – also called Thutmose – was no more than a toddler, so he needed a regent who could handle the affairs of government until he was old enough to do so himself. As tradition dictated, the job fell to the widowed queen – his stepmother and aunt. For a while, the regency played out like any other that had previously been witnessed in the ancient kingdom. Monuments and reliefs from the time depict a boyish Thutmose III performing his pharaonic duties with Hatshepsut by his side. However, by year seven of his reign, and possibly much sooner, something happened that would destroy the stability that the pharaohs of the 18th Dynasty had worked so hard to create. Hatshepsut, the female regent, took the throne as king.

The transition can be plotted through subtle changes in the reliefs and inscriptions of the time.

The 18th Dynasty family tree

The Ancient Egyptians believed in the divine right of kings. By marrying into his own family, the pharaoh could ensure that the heir was of as royal blood as possible and thus seen as legitimate by his people. It also kept the family small, lessening the chances of creating potential rivals for the throne.



The mummy of Thutmose III was discovered in the Deir el-Bahri Cache in 1881

Statues of Hatshepsut at the Temple of Hatshepsut show the queen donning the traditional false beard

A few years after Thutmose's ascension, they began depicting Hatshepsut carrying out tasks that were more commonly reserved for the pharaoh, such as making offerings to the gods and ordering up obelisks. Then she changed her title from 'King's Wife' to 'God's Wife of Amun' and took on a new name, Maatkare (from *ma'at*, meaning order and justice as established by the gods). In doing so, she was reinforcing the idea that the throne was hers by divine right. Only she was descended directly from royal blood, therefore only she could maintain the country's prosperity and stability.

However, there was still the small problem of her gender. Ancient Egyptian religion dictated that the throne could only be passed from father to son, as women were not believed to be capable of carrying out a king's duties. To legitimise her rule, Hatshepsut would have to assume male traits. Reliefs began depicting her wearing the striped nemes headdress and uraeus cobra, symbols of a king. Others depict her wearing a woman's ankle-length gown but standing in a striding pose, the same that male figures of the time were painted in. Similarly, inscriptions conveyed both the male and female elements of the new pharaoh, incorporating feminine word endings that leading to such grammatical conundrums as 'His Majesty, Herself'. As the years went on, it seems she discarded her femininity entirely and was depicted with a broad, bare chest and wearing the pharaoh's false beard.

What inspired Hatshepsut to do the impossible and crown herself pharaoh? Some say it was pure power lust, while others argue that threats from a competing branch of the royal family forced her onto the throne in order to ensure her stepson's succession. But what is certainly true is that during her reign, Thutmose III was not kept under house arrest but was instead sent to the army to learn how to become

good soldier, and therefore a good king. That it was Hatshepsut's intention to overthrow Thutmose and possibly make her daughter, Neferure, her successor, is an unlikely scenario, but should not be ruled out entirely.

Whatever the motive, Hatshepsut threw herself into the role, determined to prove herself just as a good pharaoh by virtue of her royal bloodline. She set about restoring trade routes that had been disrupted during the Hyksos occupation, dramatically increasing the wealth of the 18th Dynasty. One of these routes was to the Land of Punt, a kingdom somewhere on the Red Sea coast that has developed an almost mythological status. Five ships set out in her name, bringing back frankincense, myrrh and ebony, among other valuable goods. She also sent raiding expeditions to Byblos and Sinai. Her foreign policy is generally regarded as having been peaceful, although it is possible that she led military campaigns against Nubia and Canaan.

But it is through her building projects that Hatshepsut has left her biggest mark. Arguably one of the most prolific builders in Ancient Egypt, her commissions were grander and more numerous than any of her Middle Kingdom predecessors. She employed the great architect Ineni to construct monuments at the Temple of Karnak, as was tradition for pharaohs, as well as to restore sections that had been ravaged by foreign rulers. She erected twin obelisks at the entrance of the temple; at the time they were the tallest in the world at almost 100 feet. Reliefs commemorating the event show the obelisks being towed down the River Nile by 27 ships powered by 850 oarsmen. It would have been a monumental occasion.

It's not known exactly how many female pharaohs ruled Egypt, but most scholars accept that there were at least seven

She was also responsible for carrying out a vast public works programme across the empire, including the creation of a network of processional roadways and sanctuaries.

Hatshepsut's masterpiece, however, was her mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri. Built on the West Bank of the River Nile, near to the entrance to what is now called the Valley of the Kings, the female pharaoh kick-started a new era of royal burial at this iconic location. Its focal point was the Djeser-Djeseru, a colonnaded structure that was built into the cliff face and surrounded by gardens. It was designed by Senenmut, an architect and government official who was also the tutor of Hatshepsut's daughter. A man of low birth, Senenmut's story is a fascinating one. His name first entered the historical record on a national level as the 'Steward of the God's Wife' when Hatshepsut was still regent, although after she was crowned pharaoh, he was given more prestigious titles – 93

A relief showing Queen Hatshepsut burning incense to honour a god

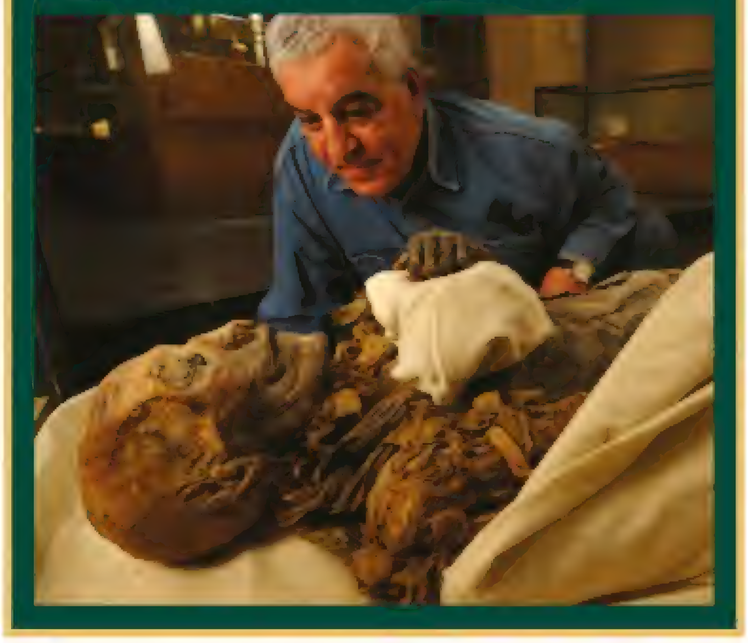
The search for Hatshepsut's mummy

After being lost to the desert for three millennia, a tiny piece of evidence revealed the truth to her whereabouts

Upon her death, the she-king was buried in tomb KV20 in the Valley of the Kings, alongside her father Thutmose I. However, when renowned Egyptologist Howard Carter excavated the tomb in 1903, he found nothing but a sarcophagus bearing her name; Hatshepsut's mummy was nowhere to be seen.

In 2007, a fresh search was launched by the former Minister of State for Antiquities Affairs Zahi Hawass to find the missing pharaoh. A number of unidentified female mummies from the 18th Dynasty were lined up and examined using the latest technology. One of the prime suspects was a mummy from tomb KV60, just in front of tomb KV20, where two women had been found. One could be identified as Hatshepsut's wet nurse thanks to the inscription on her coffin, the other an obese lady who had been found on the floor next to her.

Egyptologists had previously suggested that the mummy could be a royal one due to the positioning of the left arm across its chest, but only now did they have the technology to find out once and for all whether it belonged to Hatshepsut. The team performed CT scans of mummies known to be closely related to her, including the three Thutmoses, to try to create a composite image of the 18th Dynasty facial structure and compare it with the mummies in contention. While doing so, they also decided to scan other objects from the tombs, including a sealed wooden box bearing her cartouche. What this scan revealed proved to be the key to the mystery. In it, along with Hatshepsut's mummified liver, was a single tooth. Not only was the obese mummy from KV60 missing a tooth, it was also an exact match for the loose one found in the box. Hatshepsut had finally been found.



Five greatest building projects

Hatshepsut's commissions were so grand that after her death, many pharaohs tried to claim them as their own

Red Chapel

Hatshepsut made several contributions to the Temple of Karnak, but this was one of her largest. It was built to be a barque shrine, where a model ship was kept. The Ancient Egyptians believed these were used by the sun god to travel through the night, and also to transport the dead to the afterlife. The shrine was made of red quartzite with a black diorite foundation.

Twin obelisks

These were erected at the entrance of Karnak, and at the time they were built were the tallest structures in the world. One still stands at 97 feet tall and weighs approximately 320 tons. An inscription at its base says that it took seven months to cut the monolith out of the quarry.

Temple of Pakhet

This was an underground, cavernous shrine dedicated to the lioness goddess of war. Cut out of the rock into the cliffs east of the Nile, the temple is composed of two chambers with a connecting passageway. A huge number of mummified cats were found here, some having been brought great distances to be buried ceremonially.

Mortuary temple

By far Hatshepsut's greatest building achievement, her mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri consists of three layered terraces reaching 97 feet tall. Each is supported by columns and connected by long ramps that were once surrounded by gardens. It is considered the closest that Egypt came to classical architecture.

Precinct of Mut

One of the four main temple enclosures that make up the immense Karnak Temple Complex, the Precinct of Mut consists of a spring-fed sacred lake and a temple dedicated to the mother goddess. Pharaoh Hatshepsut restored it after it was badly damaged during the Hyksos occupation.

in total – and became the 'Great steward of Amun', which put him in charge of all of Karnak's building and business activities.

It is without a doubt that this man held significant influence in the royal court. Some historians have attributed Hatshepsut's success to him, describing him as the real force behind her rule. Others believe he may have played a far more intimate role in the pharaoh's life than this. She allowed him to place his name and an image of himself behind one of the main doors in Djeser-Djeseru, and on the walls of his tomb he is described as one who "gladdened daily the king's heart", "served in the palace of her heart", and even "saw to all the pleasures of the king". Some graffiti that was found in an unfinished tomb used as a rest house by the workers of Djeser-Djeseru depicts a male and a hermaphrodite in pharaonic regalia engaging in an explicit act. This artwork is considered further proof that the pair were engaged in a sexual relationship. Beyond this, there is little to suggest that business ever became pleasure between the pharaoh and her architect. If it had, their relationship would have been unprecedented as, despite Senenmut's numerous titles, he was still a commoner.

Senenmut went to the grave unmarried, and Hatshepsut followed shortly after in 1458 BCE after 22 years on the throne. She died in her mid 40s, possibly as a result of an infected tooth, or she may even have been poisoned by an ointment used to treat the chronic skin condition that she and her late husband had inherited from their forefathers. In a final attempt to legitimise her reign, she requested that her father, the beloved Thutmose I, be moved to her tomb so that they could rest together.

> Egyptian women had rights that many of their counterparts didn't, including the right to own property and demand divorce

Her stepson Thutmose III went on to rule for a further 30 years, proving to be a similarly ambitious builder and a mighty warrior. He led 17 campaigns in enemy-held territory, and conquered land as far north as Syria

Scientists were unable to confirm they had found Hatshepsut's mummy until they identified one of her teeth from a separate find

The Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut is located on the west bank of the Nile, in the Valley of the Kings

"Five ships set out in her name, bringing back frankincense, myrrh and ebony, among other valuable goods"

and as far south as the Fourth Cataract of the Nile. Meanwhile, the relics of Hatshepsut's reign continued to stand proud on the Egyptian skyline, her towering obelisks and imposing statues casting a shadow in her memory upon the land she once called hers.

However, towards the end of Thutmose's regency, he ordered that his stepmother's cartouches and images be chiselled away, and her statues torn down, disfigured and smashed before being buried in a pit. There was even an attempt at Karnak to surround her obelisks with walls. Various theories have been given to explain this sudden and dramatic turn of events. Some argue that this was carried out as a typical act of self-promotion during Thutmose's waning years, while others suggest it was a money-saving method, whereby existing buildings could be accredited to the current king.

It has been suggested that when Thutmose came of age, he demoted Hatshepsut back to the role of regent, and attempted to eliminate any evidence of her as pharaoh to claim that the royal succession ran directly to him from his father. It seems the most likely explanation is not a sinister one, but rather a cold, rational attempt to extinguish the memory of an "unconventional female king whose reign might possibly be interpreted by future generations as a grave offence against *ma'at*," as Tyldesley put it. She proposes that Thutmose carefully considered how the successful reign of a female pharaoh might affect the Egyptian social order, and eventually made the decision to eliminate her records so as to prevent a feminist uprising. Hatshepsut's crime may be nothing more than the fact that she was a woman.

The 18th Dynasty bore many of Egypt's most famous pharaohs, including Akhenaten, Nefertiti and Tutankhamun

There is still debate as to whether any other women managed to become pharaoh in the years following Hatshepsut's reign. One who caused much speculation was the wife of Thutmose III's great-great grandson, Nefertiti, as there is evidence that she was promoted to co-regent and possibly ruled as a pharaoh after her husband's death. It is clear that if she had, the Egyptians did not want her reign to be remembered, as just like Hatshepsut, her name was chiselled off records and her mummy damaged.

It would be more than 1,000 years before another female pharaoh would ascend to the Egyptian throne. Her name was Cleopatra and, unlike Hatshepsut, her story would be told in every corner of the globe for millennia to come.

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THUTMOSE III
EGYPT'S WARRIOR PHARAOH

After two patient decades beneath the rule of his stepmother, Thutmose emerged the greatest conqueror in Egypt's history

Words by Hareth Al Bustani

When Pharaoh Thutmose II died in 1479 BCE, he left behind a serious power vacuum. While his sister-wife Hatshepsut had produced a daughter, his only son – Thutmose III, borne of a concubine – was too young to rule. A junior acolyte in the influential Temple of Amun-Re in Karnak, the young Thutmose had been named pharaoh by his fellow priests. In reality, power and influence lay with his stepmother Hatshepsut, who ruled in his place for seven years as regent before amassing enough clout to be named a fellow pharaoh.

Hatshepsut inherited a realm of three million people, one that had blossomed under 60 years of stability and prosperity. It had even enjoyed brief military glory under her father, Thutmose I, who pillaged as far as the Euphrates, 'the river that flows backwards'. Egypt was a dynamic agriculturalist society of land owners, serfs, labourers and slaves, largely spread across rural villages and small towns along the Nile Valley. Though the young Thutmose III would blossom into one of the most brilliant, charismatic leaders the ancient world ever knew, Hatshepsut would dominate their partnership.

Aside from the Sinai mining industry, Hatshepsut revived Egypt's long-decimated trade routes, sending a fleet to Punt, near modern Somalia, down the Nile and across to the Red Sea coast. It returned overflowing with treasures, such as pure ivory, incense, make-up, baboons and panther skins. To celebrate her prosperity, she offered 31 myrrh trees, a living panther, 3,300 cattle and various treasures to Amun, the patron deity of Thebes. The expedition was immortalised at her mortuary temple, Djeser-Djeseru, built along the western cliffs of Deir el-Bahri. She also began to restore neglected temples, erecting 30-metre (98-foot) obelisks in her father's colonnaded eastern hall of Karnak – so tall the roof had to be removed.

"Egypt was a dynamic agriculturalist society"

After 21 long years, Hatshepsut died, and it was finally Thutmose's turn to emerge from his stepmother's shadow. Though he had campaigned a little in the south, following two decades of peace his northern enemy, the king of Kadesh, had grown bold, coercing the kings of Palestine and Judea into a great coalition under his leadership. No sooner had Hatshepsut died, Kadesh and its allies marched against Egypt, seizing the city of Megiddo, a vital point on the Egypt-Mesopotamia trade route. They were supported by the Mitanni, a kingdom of Hurrians stretching from the Levant through Aleppo, east of the Euphrates.

Rather than balk at the incursion, Thutmose saw it as the perfect opportunity to finally establish a legacy of his own. Wasting no time, he raised 20,000 men and marched them 240 kilometres (150 miles) across the Sinai desert to Gaza in just nine days. From there he crossed the Carmel Ridge and dealt the Kadesh coalition a crushing blow. While Kadesh and its allies relied heavily on chariots, Thutmose employed a healthy mix of charioteers, archers with composite bows and 'strong-arm boys', equipped with throwing

To the east of the Temple of Karnak, Thutmose built the spectacular Festival Hall, sprawling 3,060m² (32,938ft²)

Thanks to Thutmose's exploits, warships arrived in Egypt every October, full of foreign goods and slaves, from as far as the Aegean Islands

Marching as far as Anatolia and the Euphrates, Thutmose embarked on Egypt's longest ever campaign of expansion and conquest

A Land Divided

An enduring legacy of Thutmose's building efforts, one of his Heliopolis obelisks today looms over London's Victoria Embankment

Master builder

Thutmose created just as prolifically as he destroyed

Though Thutmose was a great conqueror, destroying all kingdoms in his path, he was also a prodigious builder, particularly in the last decade of his reign, commissioning great works in more than 50 locations – stretching from Byblos on the coast of Lebanon to Gebel Barkal in Sudan.

He donated vast riches to the Amun-Ra Temple at Karnak, constructing the Sixth and Seventh Pylons, building an enormous sacred lake and filling the gardens with exotic plants and animals from Asia. To the east, he built a new colonnaded Festival Hall sprawling 3,060m² (32,938ft²) with a botanical garden chamber, depicting plants from his new conquests. One of Thebe's most spectacular monuments, it would later host the annual Opet Festival. During his reign, he expanded the overall Karnak temple complex from 9,555m² (103,000ft²) to 15,800m² (170,000ft²).

While his architect erected obelisks to commemorate his 30th jubilee, when Thutmose returned from the Euphrates he commissioned a pair of appropriately epic obelisks at the Karnak temple celebrating his conquests. On his 40th jubilee, he also erected two magnificent obelisks at Heliopolis, today standing tall in New York and London.

Having built spectacular tombs for his elites and officials, his own mortuary temple, Djeser Akhet, was built in six years. Designed to supersede Hatshepsut's masterpiece, it became the ultimate destination along the annual Beautiful Festival of the Valley procession.

spears, bronze swords or long mace axes – used to deadly effect as evidenced by the number of severed hands his men took as souvenirs. Though the king of Kadesh escaped, his family were taken hostage, and Thutmose made off with a healthy haul of 924 chariots, 2,238 horses and 200 suits of armour – alongside royal treasures plundered from the king himself.

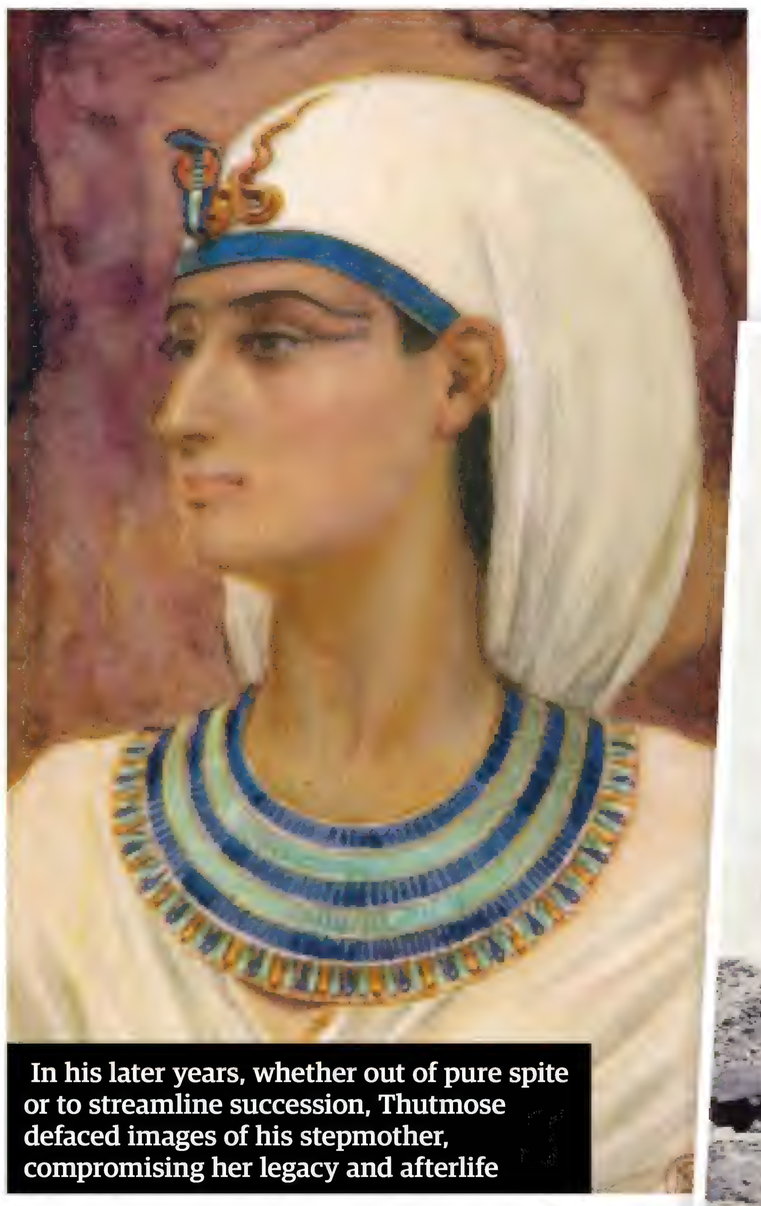
Pushing further north, Thutmose built a fort, named 'Thutmose-is-the-Binder-of-the-Barbarians', to create a bulwark against further incursions. Rather than risk over-extending himself, he reorganised his new holdings – replacing rebellious rulers with loyal ones and granting them relative autonomy in return for regular tribute payments. For good measure, their eldest sons were taken to Thebes, not merely held hostage, but educated as future friends of Egypt.

By October, Thutmose had conquered Palestine, taken three cities in the south of Lebanon and pushed into Damascus, stripping rebellious towns of wealth, and hauling 193 kilograms (426 pounds) of gold and silver back to Egypt, alongside artworks and other spoils. His army had become a well-oiled machine, capable of splitting into various units, while maintaining communication lines and, if need be, reuniting to mount singular assaults. Back at Thebes he held the inaugural Feasts of Victory – offering scores of towns, treasure, land, serfs and herds to the Temple of Amun. Two years later, returning to the Levant, he was greeted by emissaries sent by the Assyrian king, who ruled a distant land on the upper Tigris. He sent a generous gift of Babylonian lapis lazuli and horses, which Thutmose interpreted as tribute.

Lapis lazuli, a deep-blue metamorphic rock, was used in the funeral mask of Tutankhamun

In the 29th year of his reign, Thutmose decided that if he wanted to utterly annihilate Kadesh, he'd need a foothold on the Mediterranean coast. Building a fleet at Peru-nefer, near Memphis, he set sail for Phoenicia and Syria, regrouping his forces and overwhelming a coastal city opposite the wealthy harbour of Tunip. Before long, neighbouring merchant rulers flocked from across the coast to bend the knee. Thutmose returned the next year to the seaport of Simrya by the river Eleutherus, and marched up the valley towards Kadesh.

Situated on the west of the Orontes river, the capital of Kadesh was Syria's most formidable fortress, dominating a major inland road, surrounded by a moat at the north end of a high valley. When Thutmose laid siege to it, the walls took so long to fall that the coastal town of Arvad assumed the Egyptian advance was beginning to reverse, and rose up in revolt – withholding tribute payments. When Kadesh did eventually fall, Thutmose returned to the coast, making a bloody example of Arvad before sailing from harbour to harbour, stamping out resistance.



In his later years, whether out of pure spite or to streamline succession, Thutmose defaced images of his stepmother, compromising her legacy and afterlife

The Temple of Thutmose III at Deir el-Bahari was dedicated primarily to the god Amun, both in the form of Amun-Ra and Amun-Kamutef

> *"Thutmose had established Egypt as a dominant sea power"*

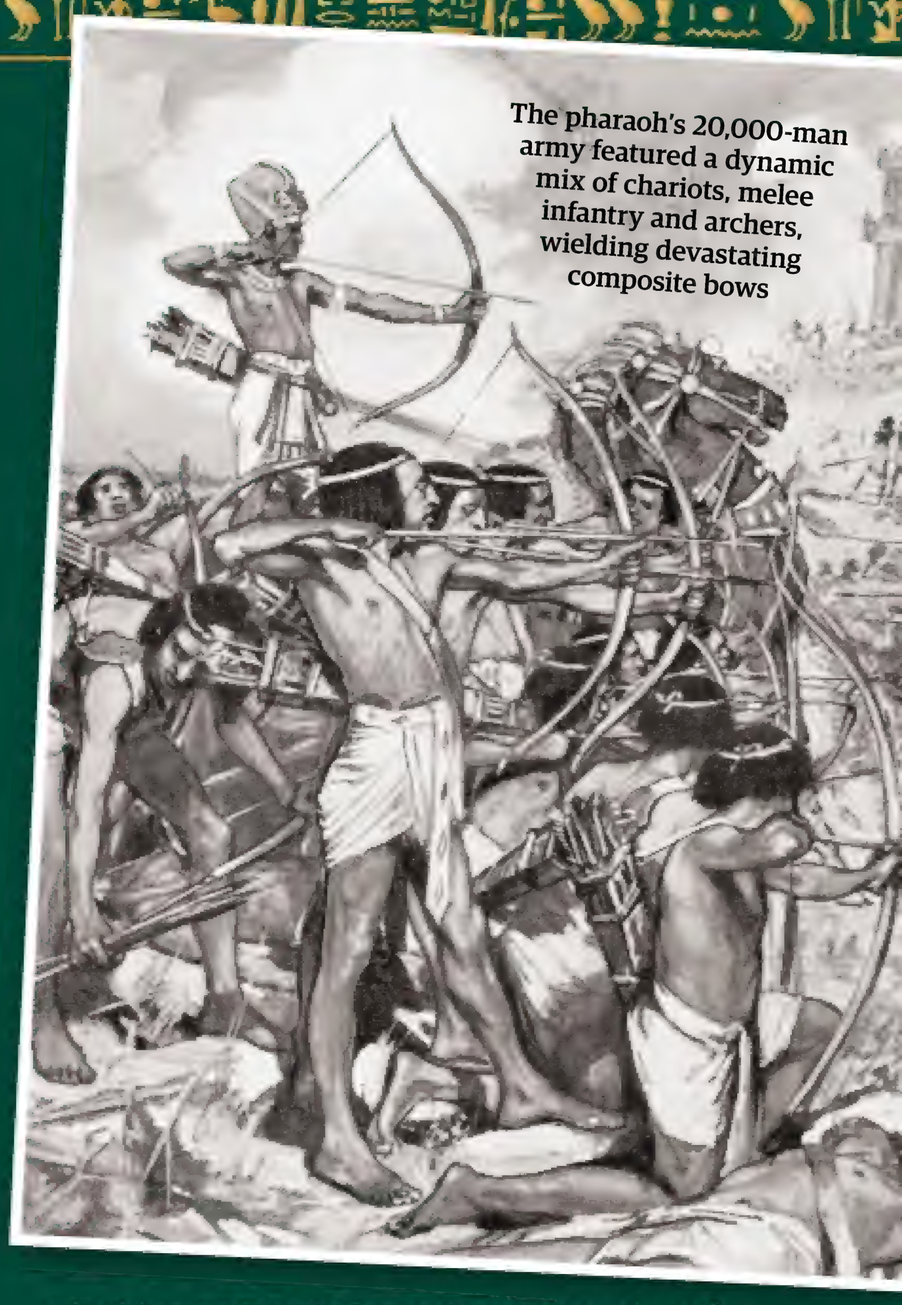
Thutmose, the son of Thutmose II with a concubine, was proclaimed pharaoh by his fellow priests at the Temple of Amun

Having finally defeated the mighty Kadesh in his 33rd year, Thutmose looked further east to his true enemy, the kingdom of Mitanni. Sailing once again to Simyra, he retraced his steps, this time travelling up the Orontes and capturing the city of Senzar. Village by village he stormed across the land, barraging through an enormous Mitanni army and taking Aleppo before heading north, capturing settlements and laying waste to the land. For the first time since his grandfather's rule, though the Mitanni refused to engage them in open battle, the Egyptians were once again plundering the Euphrates valley.

Now in southeast Anatolia, Thutmose devastated the city of Carchemish on the western bank of the Euphrates. Here, after ten years of war, he looked out over the river, watching his men haul their pontoons from ox carts, savouring the moment. After crossing, he set a boundary tablet alongside his grandfather's. The temptation to press onto the Mitanni capital was strong, but Thutmose was already deep into enemy territory. He had been too patient to risk losing it all now.

Instead he went back west, taking the city of Niy, where he and his men took part in an elephant hunt. Keenly aware of the great threat upon their doorsteps, local Mitanni nobles sheepishly came to offer tribute. On the way home, Thutmose also received gifts from the Babylonians, and even from the emerging Hittites of Anatolia. With his coastal logistics, Thutmose had established Egypt as a dominant sea power – with influence over not only the king of Cyprus, but the Aegean Islands too.

After capturing the son of the chief of Irem, neighbouring Punt, Thutmose returned to Mitanni to crush a coalition of princes, led by the Mitanni king. Seven years later, now in the 42nd year of his rule, he put down an even greater rebellion – razing the land around Kadesh and returning for one last time the Conqueror of the Hyksos. Though his focus had been on the northeast, Thutmose continued pressing in other directions, taking the western oasis region and giving it to his marshal, the count of Thunis. In Thebes he received envoys from the south, bearing tribute from Nubia, where he had conquered some 115 settlements up the Nile – campaigning well into his 50th year in power. Before Thutmose, the average ruler embarked on a military expedition every five years – Thutmose led one almost every year,



The pharaoh's 20,000-man army featured a dynamic mix of chariots, melee infantry and archers, wielding devastating composite bows

embarking on Egypt's longest ever campaign of expansion and conquest.

In old age, the pharaoh's resentment for his stepmother reached a boil, and he committed to a widespread campaign of damnatio memoriae. In the temple of Karnak, he covered her name on great obelisks with masonry sheathing, chipped her images off the temple walls, and destroyed statues of her supporters – wiping her not just from history, but potentially from the afterlife, too.

> 'Damnatio memoriae' (condemnation of memory) means a person is excluded from official accounts

He spent most of his winters travelling across Egypt, clamping down on corruption in local authorities and tax collection. The Egyptians eagerly awaited October, when war galleys arrived unloading foreign crafts, furniture and produce. Others unloaded gold and silver tribute offerings, along with exotic slaves. The treasury was raking in more than 350 kilograms (800 pounds) of gold every year, and on one occasion weighed out 4,056 kilograms (8,943 pounds) of gold-silver alloy.

With his health in decline, and the realm more powerful than ever, Thutmose named his son Amenhotep II co-regent, finally dying in 1447 BCE, a year later. He was buried in the Valley of the Kings, his name feared for generations among the Asiatics and adorned on Egyptian amulets of power: The Strong Bull Arising in Thebes.

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BATTLE OF MEGIDDO 1457 BCE

Discover how this rebellion against the Egyptian empire was crushed

Words by Steve Wright

Generally recognised as the first battle to have been recorded in a high level of detail, this isn't the only reason that the Battle of Meggido of 1457 BCE bears historical significance. Thanks to Pharaoh Thutmose III's victory, it marked the dawn of an even more prosperous era for the empire.

For the first 22 years of his reign, Thutmose shared the title of pharaoh with his stepmother and aunt, Hatshepsut. With her death in 1457 BCE and Thutmose's subsequent solo rule, however, came the potential for chaos. Long dissatisfied with the dominion Egypt held over them, the king of Kadesh fermented open rebellion.

Uniting with the Mitanni and various Canaanite city states, such as Megiddo, they presented an early hurdle for Thutmose. Megiddo controlled the Via Maris, a vital trade route for the Egyptians, as well as serving as part of a buffer between the Hittite empire. A battle became inevitable.

EGYPT

TROOPS 10,000-20,000
CHARIOTS 10,000

THUTMOSE III

LEADER

As pharaoh of Egypt, he was not only a king, but also the commander-in-chief of the empire's military forces.

Strength The head of the great Egyptian empire, he possessed greater numbers and the support of experienced military commanders.

Weakness Having only recently become pharaoh, his youth and inexperience was the prime reason for the Canaanite rebellion.

CHARIOT

KEY UNIT

The ancient equivalent of a battle tank, this was efficient at inflicting surprise and devastating assaults on opposing forces.

Strength Fast and powerful, they also provided a great vantage point within which to pick off the enemy with arrows.

Weakness Lacked skill and proficiency with their bows.

COMPOSITE BOW

KEY WEAPON

Strength A recent invention, this was mounted on the chariots, and proved devastating to solo enemy infantry.

Weakness Limited by the finite nature of the ammunition – once all the arrows were used up it was basically useless.

8. Egyptians plunder camp
Left with little in the way of opponents to fight, the Egyptians took to plundering the now-deserted enemy camp instead. Their takings included 340 prisoners, 38 officers, 84 children of the enemy, 2,041 horses, 924 chariots, 200 coats of mail, 502 bows, 1,796 slaves, innumerable livestock, bowls, weapons and much more. Thutmose's commander and military scribe, Tjaneni, goes into great detail of exactly what was taken by the Egyptians.

6. Chariot attack
With the Canaanite coalition being composed of a number of different forces, all with contrasting commanders and different ideas, it was reported to Thutmose by his scouts that disunity was rife. With this in mind the pharaoh seized the opportunity for a pre-emptive strike, ordering the chariot forces to attack from the west and south, in the process inflicting heavy casualties on the Canaanites.

4. Rebels caught out
As it turned out, Thutmose's suspicions were proved to be correct. The Canaanite infantry had been divided into two parts, guarding the routes at Taanach and Djefti, while their chariots were more central, close to the city of Megiddo itself. They had banked on the Egyptians attacking the infantry, who would then 'retreat' and cause the Egyptians to follow, leaving them vulnerable to chariot attack.

2. Thutmose's council
Between Yehem and Megiddo was the Mount Carmel Ridge, through which there were three main routes: the northern path through Djefti, which came out north of Megiddo; the southern route, ending at Taanach to the south of Megiddo; and the central mountain pass near Aruna, which provided the closest route to the city. This was the shortest way, but also the one that was the easiest to defend, and thus potentially the most perilous.

10. Siege
Ultimately, the inhabitants of Megiddo held out for seven months under siege before surrendering, with Thutnose forcing the issue with the construction of a moat and palisade. Although the king of Kadesh had escaped during the intervening months, this was but a minor setback; Thutnose had successfully combatted a serious threat to the Egyptian empire, simultaneously consolidating his strength and setting down a marker for future glories.

9. Canaanites fortify Megiddo
While the Egyptians were distracted, the Canaanites took the opportunity to rescue their fleeing army, as well as further fortifying the city in the face of the imminent invasion.

7. Canaanites retreat
Taken off guard by the attack and their line broken by the superior manoeuvrability and cooperation of the Egyptian forces, the Canaanites quickly capitulated, turning tail and fleeing back towards the city – the kings of Megiddo and Kadesh among their number – closing the gates behind them as they went.

5. Vanguard wait for rear to catch up
Their plan in place, the Egyptians advanced towards Megiddo, their forces having been divided into three sections. One was posted northwest of Meggido, and another infantry section south of the Qinah, while Thutmose remained with the chariots at the town of Aruna, to the west of Megiddo.

3. Through the narrow pass
Against the advice of his generals – whose intelligence reports claimed that the central pass was blocked by Canaanite forces – Thutmose chose this way. In what was to prove an effective double bluff, he saw that the enemy would be expecting him to second-guess them, and thus took the direct route.

1. March to Gaza
Having gathered his forces – consisting primarily of infantry and chariots – at the border fortress of Tjaru, Thutmose then embarked on a ten-day march to the city of Gaza before moving on to Yehem.

KING OF KADESH

TROOPS 10,000-15,000
CHARIOTS 1,000

KING OF KADESH
LEADER

The de facto leader of a coalition of rebels against the Egyptian empire, including the Canaanites, Kadesh, Megiddo and Mitanni.

Strength Possessed similar numbers to the Egyptian forces, and possessed a well-fortified city to use as a base.

Weakness Made a critical tactical error in underestimating the military nous of the young pharaoh.

INFANTRY
KEY UNIT

The standard footsoldiers of the rebel forces formed the bulk of their army.

Strength Well armed, they stood at the face of three passes – all they had to do was keep these routes guarded.

Weakness Command was divided among various princes from different factions, who disagreed about which strategies to implement.

LONG SPEARS
KEY WEAPON

The weapon of choice for the infantry, these could be an imposing weapon in the right hands.

Strength Relatively easy to wield, and had a decent range for a handheld weapon.

Weakness Didn't always prove to be an effective defence against chariot-mounted archers' ammunition.

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RISE & FALL

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PEACE AND PROSPERITY OF AMENHOTEP III

In a time of relative peace, the son of Thutmose IV led Egypt to a zenith of political and economic power. His name was Amenhotep III

Words by Dom Reseigh-Lincoln

When Amenhotep III, the ninth pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty, came to power he inherited a realm in its prime. The military successes instigated by his ancestor (and progenitor of the dynasty) Ahmose I, 150 years before, had kick-started the nation into an age of transformation. Nurtured by the rulers that followed, Egypt had cast aside the reclusive and insular policies of old and expanded the kingdom by trade and sheer economic might. The country had entered a new golden age and the politically savvy Amenhotep III would preserve that prosperity not with blades and blood, but with marriage and diplomacy.

The New Kingdom, one of the distinct eras when Ancient Egypt enjoyed a peak as a civilisation, was a stark contrast to the Second Intermediate Period that had preceded it. Political in-fighting, economic despondency and an insular shunning of the outside world left Egypt weak and vulnerable – so it was no surprise when half the country was invaded and subsequently occupied by Hyksos raiders. Having grown strong over time, these settlers established a new royal dynasty to rival the weakened line residing in Thebes. For over 100 years, Egypt had therefore been divided between the two centres of influence. That was until warrior king Ahmose I flexed his muscles and displayed his might, taking up the mantle laid down by his family and banishing the Semitic usurpers back over the border.

Amenhotep III was a keen hunter and steles depicting his exploits hunting lions were distributed throughout the kingdom

And so came a new era for the Egyptian people – the seeds of the New Kingdom had been sown, and over the next 150 years, the kings that followed moulded the nation through military campaigns and the fortification of vital trade routes and agreements. The Nubians to the south and the remainder of the Hyksos to the north had learned to fear the wrath of the pharaohs once again.

When Amenhotep III was born, sometime between 1386 BCE and 1388 BCE, he found himself with few cares. The son of Thutmose IV and Mutemwiya, the young prince didn't begin his life with a secure hold on the throne, either. His mother was considered a 'minor wife' and was often overshadowed by the more powerful and favoured Queen Nefertari and later Queen Iaret. It's not known if Nefertari or Iaret had legitimate children of their own with the king, but it seems unlikely since the Theban prince inherited the throne around 1391 BCE.

Amenhotep was between six and 12 when he was made king of Egypt, and within two years he was already married. His first wife, Tiye, would forever remain his favourite and she would eventually bear him three sons: Grand Prince Thutmose (who would train as a priest but ultimately predecease his father before he could assume the throne), Amenhotep (who would go on to stylise himself as the religious

Amun vs Aten

As powerful as King Amenhotep III was, another power was growing in the realm, one that had been there long before he ascended to the throne: the church of Amun. Ancient Egypt was a polytheistic kingdom, worshipping multiple gods, much like the Norse or the Greeks. However, it wasn't uncommon for one god or goddess to rise in prominence if favoured by a particular monarch – the Thebans of the 11th Dynasty had chosen Amun, and his prominence had risen even higher following the expulsion of the Hyksos. The church had grown with him and now controlled as much land and wealth as the king, often attempting to influence politics within Amenhotep III's court.

As a result, the king began paying tribute to the minor god Aten in an attempt to draw influence away from the bothersome church. The following Amenhotep IV hoped to garner around his new favoured deity never reached the height he desired during his reign, but the shadow of the church of Amun would have a profound effect on prince Amenhotep and ultimately lead to one of the biggest theological upheavals in Egyptian history.

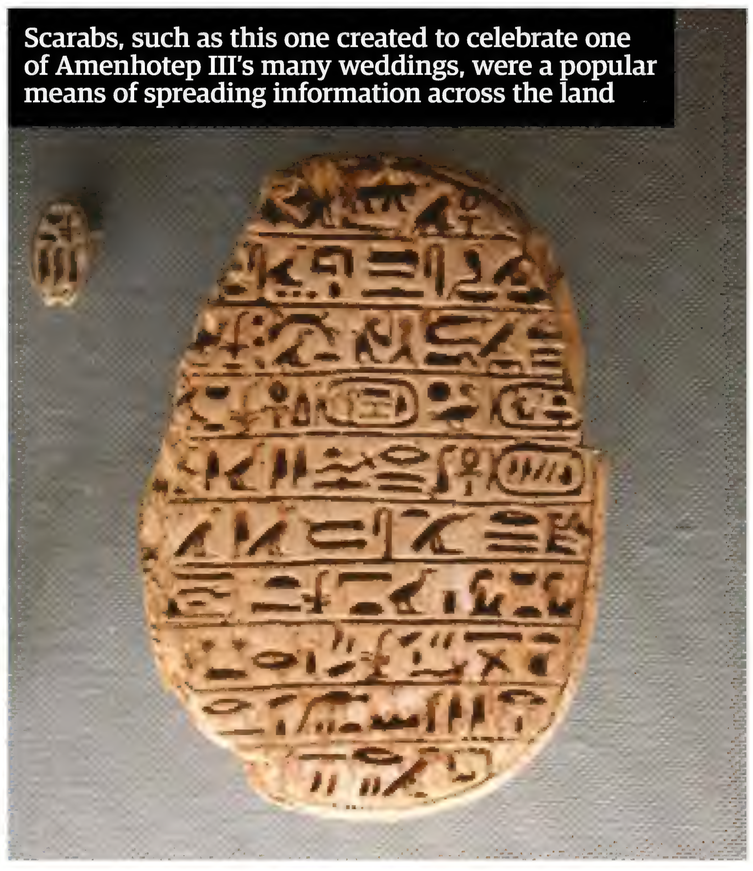
zealot Akhenaten upon inheriting the throne as Amenhotep IV) and Smenkhkare (who would go on to briefly succeed his brother on the throne years later). The royal couple also welcomed four daughters into the world: Iset, Sitamun, Nebetah and Henuttaneb.

Amenhotep went on to amass a number of wives, as was the custom for pharaohs throughout Ancient Egyptian history. Many were the products of political negotiations, but two were far closer to home. During the last decade of his reign, Amenhotep III elevated two of his own daughters – Iset and Sitamun – to the status of 'Royal Wives'. By modern standards, such unions appear horrifying, but for the royal families of the Nile it was common practice. Kings were often advised by courtiers and priests to improve their chances of having a son succeed them by ensuring they married only royal blood. Incest was far from a taboo for the Ancient Egyptians – even the gods and goddesses of the Egyptian pantheon were known for their incestuous bonds (such as the goddess Hathor who was both mother and wife to Ra).

With no wars or great military campaigns to his name, the reign of Amenhotep III might sound a little uneventful; however, just because he wasn't having to constantly look to his borders didn't mean the new king lived a quiet life. From his earliest years, Amenhotep III dreamed of recapturing the abject beauty and aesthetic pomp of the previous golden age, the Old Kingdom. And so began a reign typified by opulence; it was a hyperactive three decades of monumental construction. Over 250 statues, temples, buildings and steles (clay tablets usually created to promote the successes and absolute sovereignty of a monarch) were constructed over his time as king.

Amenhotep III commissioned a new pleasure palace at Malkata (located on the West Bank of the Nile, opposite Thebes) and a staggering 600 statues of the goddess Sekhmet at the Temple of Mut at Karnak. He even had two giant, 21m (70ft) tall enthroned statues of himself and queen Tiye in Thebes as part of the Necropolis. Sadly, time hasn't been kind to many of Amenhotep's monumental creations, but the Colossi of Memnon, located in modern-day Luxor, remain as a dual testament to the grand nature of the 18th Dynasty king's vision of a beautified Egypt.

The pharaoh's building spree didn't just extend to the creation of tributes either – Amenhotep III took a far more hands-on approach when it came to interacting with the subjects of his kingdom. Steles, describing his achievements as a ruler and Egypt's position at the centre of culture and civilisation, were sent to every corner of the land. Unlike many of his fellow kings, Amenhotep III seemed a savvy politician at heart, who understood the importance of image and legacy. These steles were very much the propaganda of the age, but the king ensured these boasts were justified; roads were relaid across the kingdom, with new temples and buildings repaired or rebuilt wherever it was



Scarabs, such as this one created to celebrate one of Amenhotep III's many weddings, were a popular means of spreading information across the land

Defining moment

Amenhotep becomes king
1388-1386 BCE

Following the deaths of his father Thutmose IV, the six- to 12-year-old prince inherits the throne during a ceremony in the capital, Thebes. The young pharaoh assumes a kingdom at the height of its prosperity, influence and military prowess. The wars and military excursions conducted by his forebears have moulded the nation into one of the most formidable powers in the world, so Egypt enjoys an unrivalled era of peace.

Defining moment

Second son is born
1380 BC

Amenhotep (later Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten) is born. His older brother, great prince Thutmose, dies while serving as a priest in the church of Amun. While his father would continue the relative peace of the New Kingdom era, Amenhotep IV would end up reversing much of his father's efforts to solidify Egypt's political and economic prominence. After witnessing the rise and negative influence of the church of Amun, Amenhotep IV (assuming the new title Akhenaten) drains the treasury, neglects his people and forces the nation to worship a single god.

Timeline

1411 BCE
Amenhotep is born
The son of Thutmose IV and one of his favoured wives Mutemwiya, Amenhotep is the second of two sons to be born into the royal family.

1387 BCE
Limestone quarries opened
One of the first actions Amenhotep III makes as king is to open a number of limestone quarries in Tura in preparation for his monument-building spree.

1386 BCE
Amenhotep III marries Queen Tiye
The king ends up marrying a number of women (around nine, including two of his own daughters), but none of them shares the popularity and influence of his first, Tiye.

1383 BCE
Brief Nubian campaign
Amenhotep III conducts his first and only military excursion around his fifth year of regnal rule. It's not considered to be particularly important and more a symbolic flexing of Egypt's might.

The mortuary temple built by Amenhotep III is mostly a ruin now. Among the rubble only the impressive Colossi of Memnon have survived

needed. Amenhotep III wanted the whole kingdom to reflect on its hard-fought wealth and status, and it showed.

Events during this period have also revealed an equality between Amenhotep III and Queen Tiye. The king was so passionate about his building projects, he often focused all his attention on them – this left much of his political responsibilities to his wife. While these absences weren't reflective of his entire reign, it still gave the queen the opportunity to prove her political prowess in court and affairs of state. She became a popular head of state and is often portrayed as equal height in pictures of them together – a startling representation of the equality shared between the couple.

Amenhotep III also paid considerable attention to diplomacy during his reign. Instead of waging wars on the battlefield, the 18th Dynasty monarch used the power of political engagements to maintain Egypt's relative stability. He built relations with a number of kingdoms, most notably with the kings of Mitanni (modern-day northern Syria) Shuttarna II and his son Tushratta. In fact, his relations were so strong, he even arranged to marry not one, but two of Shutterna II's princesses. Of course, it should be noted that pharaohs often took multiple wives, usually favouring one or two by elevating them to the status of 'Great Royal Wife'.

> By his death, Egypt's sphere of influence stretched from the Euphrates to the Fourth Cataract of the Nile

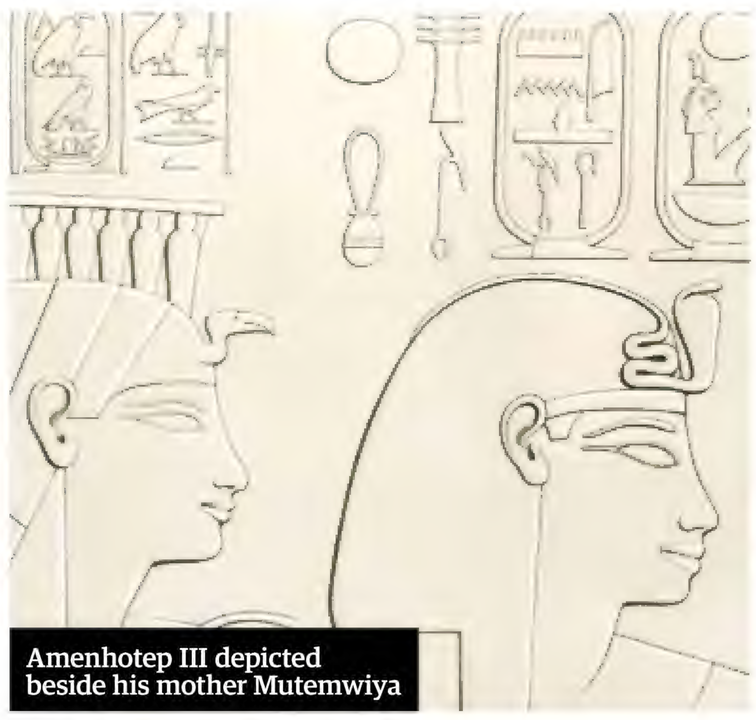
Amenhotep III was no meek negotiator when it came to the pressure of diplomacy; many leaders and monarchs wrote to the king offering tribute in exchange for the hand of one of his daughters in marriage. One such request from the Babylonian king Kadashman-Enlil during the final years of Amenhotep III's reign was outright rejected by the king with the words: "For time immemorial, no daughter of the king of Egy[pt] is given to anyone." This exchange and many more were recorded on a series of clay tablets known as the *Amarna Letters*, and their contents have proved invaluable in understanding the geopolitical landscape in an age where Egypt was in ascendancy.

Amenhotep died around 1353 BCE, possibly from a variety of ailments including arthritis, severe dental problems and perhaps even obesity. He was buried in the Western Valley of the Valley of the Kings. When he passed the throne to his son, Amenhotep IV, Amenhotep III left behind a kingdom at the height of its power and influence. However, it was a realm united to an equally prominent church, and one that would be shaken to its core with the revolution that followed.

Queen Tiye: ruling as two

Of all the individuals Amenhotep III met in his life, none had more of an impact than his first wife, Tiye. Upon their marriage in around 1390-1388 BCE, Amenhotep III elevated his new queen to the title of Grand Royal Wife. This new title essentially preserved her power in the royal household among the many wives the king would collect over his lifetime. By the same token, it also made her the most powerful woman at court. Such a position has often been noted as belonging to a king's mother, but Amenhotep III's mother never claimed the title during her time as queen, leaving herself at the mercy of the new queen.

In Ancient Egypt, it was through women that the royal lineage was carried, so the queen enjoyed a much revered status at court. Amenhotep III was the quintessential king as a young man, bold and with a love of sports and hunting, but he always turned to his Great Royal Wife for guidance. She was his most trusted advisor and confidante; as such, she wielded a great deal of power. So defined was her status that foreign rulers were often happy to negotiate through her and she was the first queen of Egypt to have her name officially recorded on new acts of state.



Amenhotep III depicted beside his mother Mutemwiya

Defining moment

Amenhotep III dies
1353 BCE

After over 30 years of peaceful rule, the Egyptian monarch passes away. Studies of his remains show he likely suffered from severe arthritis and decaying teeth. Both would have caused him considerable pain and likely added to his reportedly frail appearance in those final years of his rule. Some historians have presented the theory that the king shared his rule in co-regency with the young Amenhotep IV, but most historians and historical authors subscribe to the theory that Amenhotep III ruled with his wife until his death.

1378 BCE
Amenhotep marries Gilukhepa
As part of his careful web of alliances with the surrounding kingdoms, Amenhotep III agrees to marry the daughter of the Mitanni king, Shuttarna II.

1370 BCE
A daughter is born
Amenhotep III and Queen Tiye welcome a daughter, Situman, into the world. She and her sister Iset would eventually marry their own father.

1356 BCE
First Jubilee Sed Festival
The king and the queen celebrate their first jubilee after 30 years of rule on the thrones of Egypt. These nationwide celebrations are named after the wolf god, Sed.

1352 BCE
Amenhotep marries Tadukhepa
In the 36th year of his reign, a whole 26 years after marrying her aunt Gilukhepa, Amenhotep III marries another Mitanni princess.

1350 BCE
The Colossi of Memnon are completed
After years of careful planning and construction, the giant statues depicting Amenhotep and his queen Tiye are finally finished at the Theban necropolis.

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NEFERTITI
BEHIND THE BEAUTY

The chiselled features and perfect proportions of her limestone bust is recognised the world over. But who was the woman behind the masterpiece?

Words by Alicea Francis

On 6 December 1912, an Egyptian workman digging along the banks of the River Nile unearthed one of the most precious treasures in the history of Egyptology. The man was one of many working on the excavation of an ancient sculptor's workshop, a dig overseen by German archaeologist Ludwig Borchardt. As he felt the knowing jolt of his pick against hard stone, he brushed away the earth to reveal the distinctive colours of ancient paintwork, and immediately called for his superior. Borchardt recalls: "The tools were put aside and the hands were now used," revealing the slender neck of a limestone bust buried upside down in the dirt. Digging deeper, they revealed a pair of full, red lips; a dramatic, sloping nose; almond eyes; and dark, arching eyebrows. Finally, they uncovered a huge cylindrical crown, one that had only been seen before in the few existing hieroglyphic depictions of one Ancient Egyptian: Queen Nefertiti.

Since its discovery, the bust has become one of the most visited and iconic artefacts of the ancient kingdom. Yet it remains one of the most elusive. Following their reign, Nefertiti and her husband, the pharaoh Akhenaten, were wiped from Egypt's historical records, their faces chiselled away from stone reliefs, their names scratched out from inscriptions. To add to the mystery, all references to Nefertiti vanished in about the 12th year of Akhenaten's reign, with no mention of her made thereafter. What had they done to instil such hatred in their people? And why did Nefertiti suddenly disappear? It is only now, more than 3,000 years after their deaths, that the answers are being discovered.

The truth about Nefertiti's parentage is uncertain, but it is likely that she was born outside of the royal family

The truth about Nefertiti's parentage is uncertain, but it is likely she was born outside of the royal family: possibly the daughter of a court vizier, or a Mittani princess sent to unite two kingdoms. What we do know is that her face was one of timeless beauty – her name means 'the beautiful one has come' – and she would have been a desirable match for the young Egyptian prince, then known as Amenhotep. The pair were married in their mid-teens, had their first child shortly after, and ascended the throne around 1351 BCE. What is known of their early reign is sketchy, but archaeologists have deduced that throughout the 18th Dynasty, a cult of the god Amun had grown incredibly powerful, so much so that by the time Amenhotep was crowned, the cult's priests were almost as powerful as the pharaoh himself.

But in the fifth year of Amenhotep's reign, something extraordinary happened. The pharaoh changed his name to Akhenaten, plundered and closed down the temples and threw the priests out of office. After thousands of years of polytheism, he and Nefertiti declared that there was now only one true god: Aten, the sun-disc. And the only way to reach this god was through the pharaoh himself. Akhenaten then led a mass exodus from

“Nefertiti and her husband were wiped from Egypt’s historical records”

Egypt's female pharaohs

Most of the ancient rulers were men, but a few women became the empire's most powerful individuals

Sobekneferu

Sobekneferu was the first ruling queen. When her brother died without leaving a male heir, Sobekneferu ascended the throne. Very little else is known about her, but some believe that she is the Egyptian princess who rescued Moses from the reeds.

Nitocris

The Greek historian Herodotus listed Nitocris as the last pharaoh of the Sixth Dynasty. She is believed to have killed her brother's murderers by inviting them to a banquet in an underground chamber and flooding the room with water from the Nile.

Hatshepsut

Hatshepsut is considered one of Egypt's most successful pharaohs. She established several important trade routes, which led to a huge growth in the nation's wealth and also commissioned hundreds of building projects.

Twosret

This woman came to the throne after her young stepson, with whom she was co-regent, died. She ruled during a turbulent time and it is likely that she was overthrown during a civil war.

Cleopatra

Perhaps the most famous female pharaoh in Egypt's history, Cleopatra is infamous for her liaisons with several important Roman politicians, and is believed to have committed suicide after Mark Antony's death.

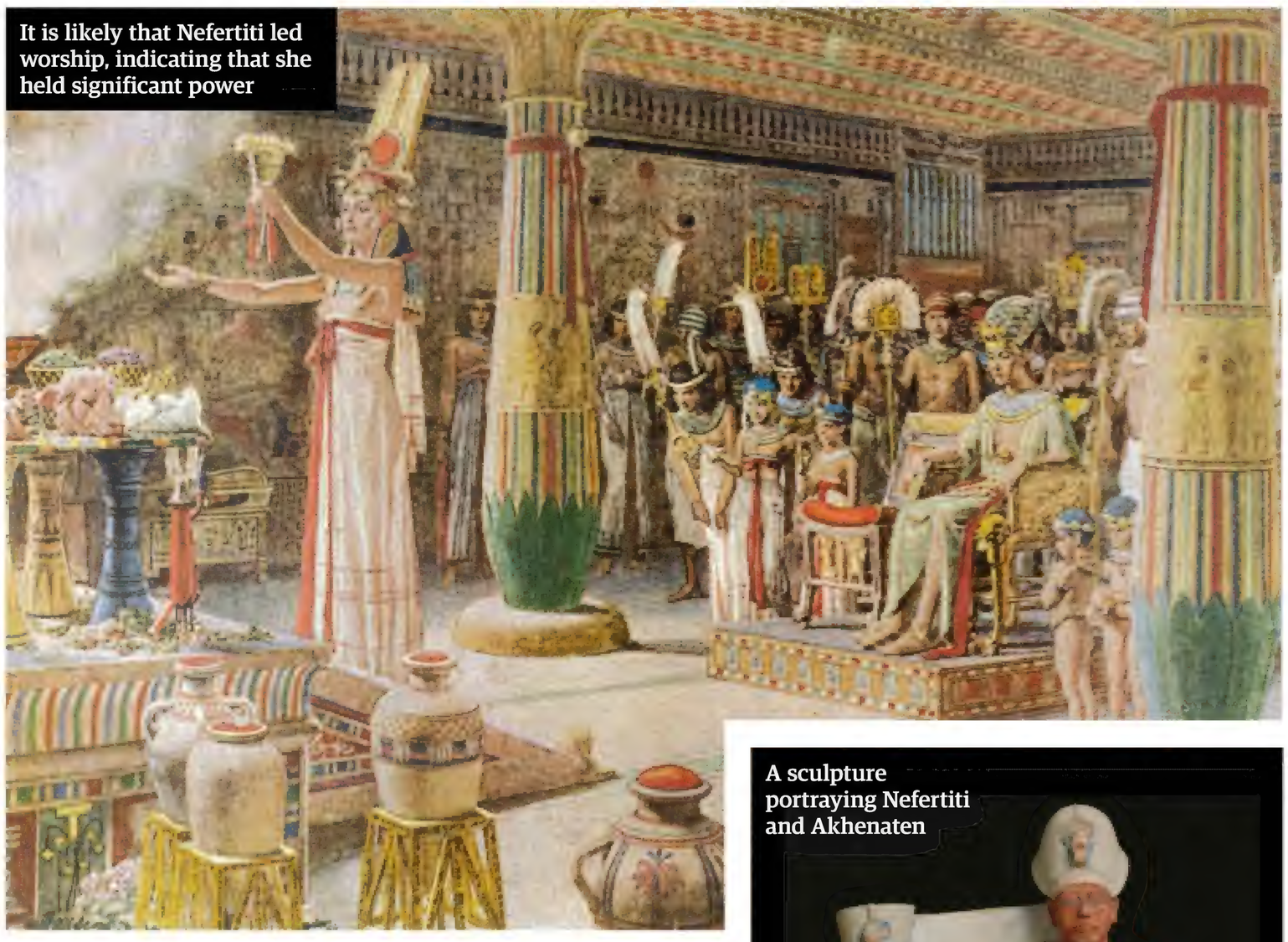
Queen Nefertiti depicted in an Amarna-era relief

the ancient capital of Thebes and set about building a new city in the middle of the desert, which he called 'Amarna'. This was to be the new centre of the Ancient Egyptian empire. The city was surrounded on three sides by inhospitable cliffs – a natural defence against enemies of the crown. The young pharaoh knew that his actions had not been popular, and the rumblings of unrest could be felt across the kingdom.

With this religious revolution also came a cultural one. Egyptian art, which before had been stiff and formal, became much more naturalistic. Depictions of Akhenaten took on a far more feminine shape, with rounded hips and a prominent chest. Scenes depicting the royal family became more intimate, showing the couple kissing and bouncing their children on their knees. But what is perhaps most extraordinary about the art of Amarna is the way Queen Nefertiti was portrayed. Reliefs and statues show Nefertiti chariot-racing, smiting enemies and even leading worship – roles that before had always been reserved for the pharaoh. During the first five years of their reign, she appeared in reliefs almost twice as often as her husband, and is often shown as being of equal size to him, suggesting that Nefertiti was far more powerful than the wives of the pharaohs before her.

> After millennia of polytheism, they declared that there was one god, Aten, and the only way to reach Him was through the pharaoh

However, it wasn't long before this period of rich culture and peace came to an abrupt end. Akhenaten had exhausted nearly all of his resources in building his new city and the nation was on the brink of bankruptcy. Large parts of the Egyptian empire had fallen under the control of the expanding Hittite kingdom, after the pharaoh had refused to listen to the advice of his generals to send military enforcements to the north. Not only was there an economic crisis, but the spiritual crisis that had been bubbling beneath the surface was ready to explode. The pharaoh's new religion had destroyed all the ancient traditions that the Egyptians held so dear,



It is likely that Nefertiti led worship, indicating that she held significant power

The ruins of Amarna as seen today, surrounded by inhospitable cliffs

A sculpture portraying Nefertiti and Akhenaten

Nefertiti: the first woman to be airbrushed?

CT scans of the famous bust have revealed that Nefertiti may not have been as beautiful as was first believed. Scientists have been able to analyse the layers of stucco below the outer one and have discovered that the original model had less prominent cheekbones, a slight bump on the ridge of the nose and even wrinkles around the mouth and cheeks. Just like modern airbrushing, it is likely that the queen's sculpture was altered to adhere to contemporary ideas of beauty.

A limestone relief depicting Nefertiti making offerings to the sun god, Aten

and very few were prepared to let go of their trusted and much-loved gods. Revolts broke out across the nation, spurred on by the bitter priests and military officials who were desperate to take back the powers that had been so ruthlessly stolen from them. By the time of his death around 1334 BCE, Akhenaten's country was a broken one.

It is unlikely that these revolts came as a surprise, but what the Egyptians could never have predicted was the disappearance of Nefertiti in the 12th year of her husband's reign. Whereas before her face had adorned the walls of temples and palaces, from the year 1339 BCE, all records and depictions of her stopped being made. What had happened to the queen - the woman the pharaoh seemed to worship? Some historians believe that she fell out of favour, perhaps because she was unable to bear Akhenaten the son he so desperately wanted. Others believe she died, a victim, perhaps, of the flu epidemic that was plaguing the country, or even at the hands of a jealous member of Akhenaten's harem.

But one piece of art, known as the Coregency Stela, suggests that Nefertiti didn't disappear, rather that she became someone else. In the piece, Nefertiti and Akhenaten are depicted with one of their daughters, but Nefertiti's name has been chiselled out and replaced with a different one - 'Ankhkheperure Neferneferuaten'. This was the name of Akenhaten's co-regent, who was crowned around the same time that Nefertiti's name disappeared from history. Could Nefertiti have taken on a new name and become her husband's co-regent? And if so, could this explain the identity of the mysterious pharaoh who came to power after the death of Akhenaten?

These are questions that we will likely never know the answer to, as in the years following his death, nearly all evidence of Akhenaten's reign was destroyed by the people he had so deeply wounded. Deemed a heretic, his name was scratched from the walls of the temples and depictions of the beautiful Nefertiti mutilated with chisels. But Akhenaten's legacy lived on in the form of a son, the identity of whose mother is still contested. The boy named Tutankhaten, meaning 'the living image of Aten', succeeded to the throne when he was about nine years old. Despite his tender age, he immediately set about reversing the changes made during his father's reign.

Amarna was abandoned and fell into ruin, the old gods were brought back from the dead and the priests of Amun were reinstated. But there remained one remnant of the old religion, one that couldn't be destroyed with a hammer or chisel. The remnant was the boy's name. Just like his father and stepmother before him, Tutankhaten gave himself a new name, a name that would honour the glory of Amun and the gods that his people loved so dearly. It was one that thousands of years later would be pasted across newsstands and history books, and known to people in every corner of the globe. That name was Tutankhamun.

Images of the royal family were more intimate then ever seen before

The search for Nefertiti

Discovered in 1898, could the female mummy of tomb KV35 belong to the famous Egyptian queen?

Since the discovery of Nefertiti's bust, archaeologists have scoured the Egyptian desert in search of her resting place. Although no formal identification has been made, one Egyptologist believes she has found Nefertiti's mummy in the tomb of Amenhotep II, the great grandfather of Akhenaten.

The mummy, known as 'The Younger Lady', was discovered buried alongside Queen Tiye, Akhenaten's mother, and a young boy, possibly his brother, back in 1898. The discoverer, Victor Loret, originally believed the mummy to be male, but a closer inspection by anatomist Dr Grafton Elliot Smith Tests concluded that it was a woman. The room containing the mummies was then sealed, and had been all but forgotten until 1993, when Egyptologist Joann Fletcher stumbled across one unlikely piece of evidence.

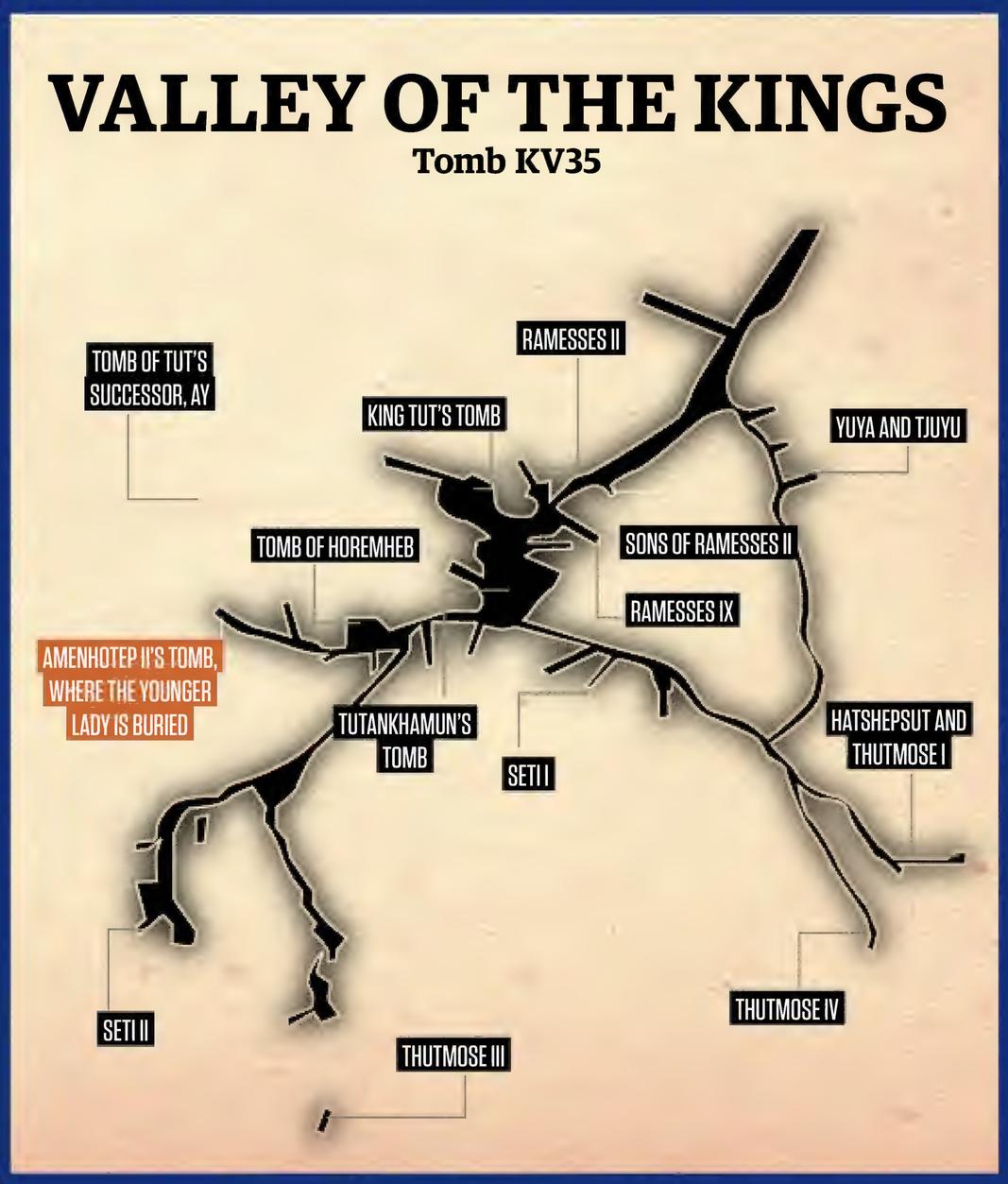
Joann, who at the time was completing a PhD in Ancient Egyptian hair, came across a wig in the Cairo Museum that was in the Nubian style - a style favoured by royal women in Akhenaten's court, and particularly by Nefertiti. The wig had been discovered in tomb KV35 - the resting place of the 18th Dynasty pharaoh, Amenhotep II. Intrigued as to the ownership of the wig, Joann requested for the sealed chamber to be re-opened.

A wall painting showing Akhenaten and Nefertiti with their young family

What she discovered within the room was curious to say the least. The only mummy to whom the wig could viably belong was that of The Younger Lady, whose head had been shaved. This lack of hair emphasised a remarkably long neck - one all too familiar to an Egyptologist who had dedicated years to the study of Egypt's Amarna period. Further inspections led to the conclusion that this mummy was indeed a woman, and one who had died in her twenties or thirties - an age that, should she have survived her husband as the evidence has suggested, would fit that of Nefertiti.

But what was perhaps most intriguing about The Younger Lady was the damage that had been inflicted upon the mummy shortly after its burial. The lower half of the mummy's face was violently smashed in, which would have been a punishment worse than death. By destroying the mummy's mouth, the spirit of the dead would be unable to speak its name at the doors of the afterlife, condemning it to an eternity of damnation. The mummy's right arm had also been broken off, and what appeared to be its detached and outstretched limb was placed beside it. But closer inspection revealed that this bodiless arm belonged to someone else entirely - it had been mummified in a different way and the measurements did not match those of The Younger Lady. In what was to become an astonishing discovery, another arm was found hidden beneath the wrappings of Queen Tiye's mummy. Unlike the first arm, this arm was bent at the elbow and its hand was clasped, indicating that it had been holding a sceptre, the sign of a pharaoh. It fit the Younger Lady perfectly. Whoever had broken off this arm had clearly wanted to destroy all evidence of this woman's power, and Nefertiti's heresy would have been an understandable motivation for the desecration of a grave.

The claim that The Younger Lady is indeed Nefertiti is one that has been met with strong contention, and is a claim that may never be resolved. But it's hard to deny that the evidence all points to one very clear conclusion.



Inside the burial chamber of tomb KV35

Joann Fletcher examining the mummy of The Younger Lady

Clues to the mystery

The physical evidence from The Younger Lady all point to the same conclusion...

Arm

The right arm has been broken off, but a detached forearm was found in the tomb that is bent at the elbow and clasping a long-vanished sceptre – the sign of a pharaoh.

Head

The mummy's head is shaved, originally leading archaeologists to conclude that it was male. However, a woman's wig was found buried alongside the mummy, in a style that was especially popular in Akhenaten's court.

Brow

There is a clear impression of a tight-fitting brow-band – something that would have been needed to support a heavy crown.

Face

The lower half of the face has been smashed in, most likely by grave robbers shortly after the woman's burial. According to Ancient Egyptian religion, this would have prevented her spirit from speaking its name, thus preventing her from entering the afterlife. The woman had clearly done something to anger someone.

Ears

The mummy has two piercings in her left ear, which was unusual in Ancient Egypt. However, depictions of Nefertiti show her with a double piercing.

Beads

Several loose beads have been found on the mummy's chest, left over from the necklace she would have worn before it was stolen. These have been identified as Nefer beads: the same beads on Nefertiti's famous bust.

INSIDE THE NILE
'MOTHER OF ALL MEN'

Tour the iconic waterway that was the lifeblood of one of the world's most powerful ancient civilisations

Words by Dave Roos

Life on the banks
The river was absolutely vital to the Egyptian economy, although its huge floods affected the settlements on its banks.

Canoes
There were different types, made from reeds or papyrus. They served as a means of exchange between traders and consumers.

Power
In the canoes, passengers either sat rowing or remained on foot, pushing with long poles.

Sails
These were square-shaped, made from papyrus fibre and located on the bridge.

Commercial vessels
They travelled from port to port with soldiers and scribes on board. They sometimes measured over 40m (131ft) in length, with a curved hull and sail.

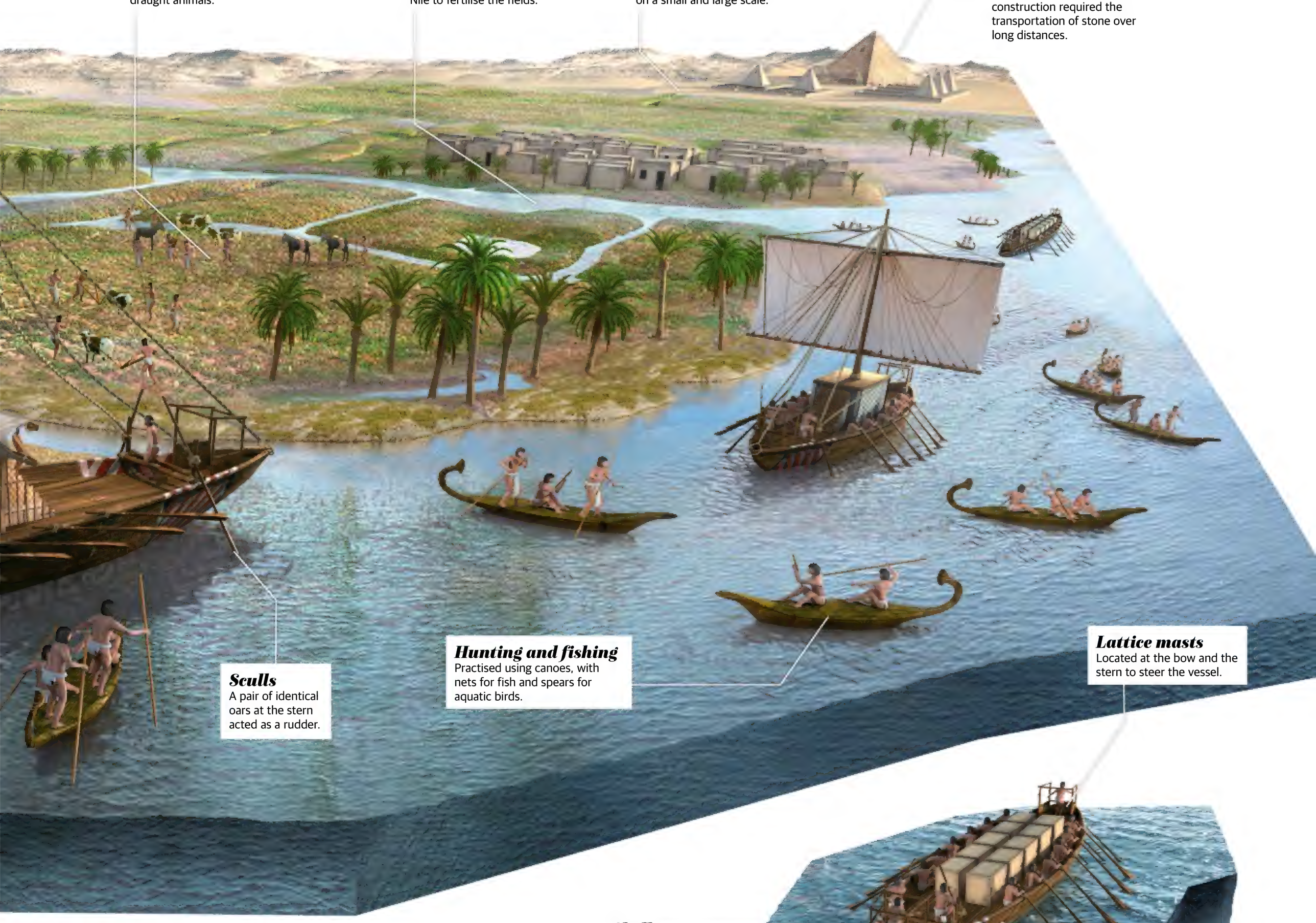
Backbone

Over the centuries, the Egyptian civilisation gradually settled along the banks of the final 1,300 kilometres (808 miles) of the Nile. Farms dominated the landscape around its banks, and its waters were the primary means of communication. For daily tasks, small canoes were used; but for trade or transporting passengers, strong sail boats were employed.

It's impossible to overestimate the importance of the Nile to the Ancient Egyptians. The 7,507-kilometre (4,665-mile) river literally brought life to an arid desert wasteland. Its fertile valleys provided protection from the harsh elements, its waters teemed with fish and fowl, and the Nile's seasonal floods deposited mineral-rich silt from the highlands to feed Egyptian soil, allowing for unprecedented agricultural abundance.

This life-giving river, known as Hapi in the age of Ramesses, was rightfully worshipped as a god. It was the chief mode of transporting shipments of grain, gold and weaponry across the length of the empire. Ramesses even placed his mortuary temple, the Ramesseum, along the banks of the upper Nile in Thebes. It doubled as a reserve bank and could hold 350 boatloads of grain, ready for shipment in the event of a poor harvest.

The pharaohs relied on astronomer priests to read the stars in order to gauge the timings of seasonal floods, which were essential for agriculture. Ramesses used marker stones in the upper Nile to carefully record river levels; he would then send word to the Delta cities when the waters began to swell. This was a cause for celebration and people sang praises to the gods during epic festivals that marked the start of the floods.



Hub of transportation

The River Nile was the link between the various Egyptian cities, from the Second Cataracts of Lower Nubia to the Mediterranean Sea. A whole host of vessels travelled the river, transporting people and goods from one side of the empire to the other.

THE MIGHTY RAMESSES II

Immortalised in legend and poetry as Ozymandias, king of kings, Ramesses II was arguably the greatest and most powerful pharaoh of the Egyptian Empire

Words by Dave Roos

The year was 1274 BCE and a god was on the march. Standing six-feet tall with a square jutting jaw, thick lips and a long sharp nose, Ramesses II rode his golden chariot ahead of an army of 20,000 archers, charioteers and sandalled infantrymen. Only five years into his reign as pharaoh, he had already established himself as a fierce warrior and strategic military commander, the rightful blood heir to the newly established 19th Dynasty and a true spiritual son of the goddess Isis herself. Ramesses' soldiers would have seen their commander-in-chief as the rest of Egypt did: as a god in the flesh possessed of legendary strength and bravery, incapable of error and on a divine mission to re-establish Egypt as the dominant superpower of the Middle East.

Ramesses' destination was Kadesh, a heavily fortified Syrian city in the Orontes River valley. Kadesh was an important centre of trade and commerce and the de facto capital of the Amurru kingdom, a highly coveted piece of land sandwiched on the border between the Egyptian and Hittite empires. As a boy, Ramesses had ridden alongside his father Seti I, when the elder Egyptian king finally wrested Kadesh from the Hittites after more than half a century of abortive attempts. But as soon as Seti returned victorious to Egypt, the scheming rulers of Kadesh re-pledged their allegiance to the Hittites. Ramesses had returned to Syria to salvage two tarnished reputations: his father's and that of his previously great empire.

Ramesses and his army had been marching for a month. They departed from the pharaoh's royal residence along the eastern edge of the lush Nile Delta in April, cutting across the Sinai peninsula, following the curve of the Mediterranean coastline up through Canaan, past the strategic highland outpost of Meggido, into the fertile valleys of Lebanon and finally arriving in the forests outside Kadesh. The pharaoh's scouts fanned out to assess the enemy's preparations for battle. The locals painted a deceptively favourable picture. The Hittite king Muwatalli was so afraid of the great Ramesses and his legendary charioteers that the Hittite army was biding its time a hundred miles away.

Ramesses had been living the life of a god for so long that perhaps he believed a little too much in his own divine intimidation. While still an infant, his grandfather helped forge a revolutionary new dynasty in Egypt, one based on military might and absolute royal authority. Ramesses' grandfather was born Paramessu, a foot soldier who had worked his way up to general in the Egyptian army. He found favour with Horemheb, another lifelong military man who had become pharaoh after the untimely death of the teenage king, Tutankhamun. Horemheb, who had no sons of his own, saw a disciple in Paramessu, someone who would carry on his aggressive campaign of brutal subjugation of rebellious tribes in Nubia, Libya and distant Syria in the name of strengthening the kingdom. When Horemheb died, Paramessu ascended the throne and changed his name to 'Ramessu beloved of Amun,' the man history knows as Ramesses I.

> After 30 years of rule, Ramesses was inducted into a group of longest serving kings. He would rule for another 36 years

From birth, Ramesses II was groomed to be pharaoh. His father Seti I inherited the throne 18 months after Ramesses I became king and his son was raised in the lavish royal palaces of the pharaohs, waited upon by nurses and handmaids and trained by tutors in writing, poetry, art and, most importantly, combat. Seti named Ramesses the commander-in-chief of the army when the boy prince was only ten years old. At 14, Ramesses began to accompany his father on military campaigns and witnessed the overwhelming

Nemes
The headdress was a mainstay throughout most of Ancient Egypt's dynasties.

Godlike image
The various details in and on the pharaoh's royal appearance were specifically designed to elevate his status as a god among men.

Sceptre
In Egyptian society the sceptre was a sign of leadership.

More construction was completed in Ramesses' reign than any other pharaoh

Anatomy of the Great Pharaoh

power of the Egyptian charioteers in combat on more than one occasion.

Now he was no longer a boy watching such campaigns but a man – a god – leading them. He was an hour's march from Kadesh and heartened to hear his enemies were rightfully trembling at his godly might. Ramesses ordered his troops to make camp. The royal tents were raised, the horses watered at a gentle tributary of the Orontes, and the soldiers circled the chariots as a half-hearted barricade against the unlikely possibility of attack. In reality, an attack was not only likely, it was imminent. It turned out the locals rounded up by the Egyptian scouts were planted by the Hittites. King Muwatalli and his large force of Hittite charioteers, archers and infantrymen were camped on the far side of Kadesh, hidden from view in the river valley. Luckily for Ramesses, a second wave of Egyptian scouts captured a pair of Hittite spies and beat the truth out of them. Muwatalli was planning an ambush. The target wasn't Ramesses' camp, but the legions of unsuspecting Egyptian infantrymen still marching. Ramesses dispatched his speediest messengers to warn the approaching troops, but it was too late. Thousands of Hittite charioteers descended upon the unprotected infantry. The Hittites rode three to a chariot: one driver, one archer and one spear-wielding warrior to cut down foot soldiers at close range. They wore ankle-length chain-mail armour, while the Egyptian infantry were naked to the curved blades of the Hittite scimitars. The heavy chariots ploughed through the ranks, littering the hillside with corpses and sending the survivors fleeing for Ramesses' camp.

What happened next says more about Ramesses II than perhaps any other event in his long reign as pharaoh. The Hittite forces pursued the decimated Egyptian army all the way to Ramesses' camp, crashing easily through the porous Egyptian defences and battling their way toward the royal tents themselves. Then, according to a first-hand account known as the *Poem of Pentaur*, Ramesses emerged from his tent and single-handedly faced down the enemy hordes: "Then His Majesty appeared in glory like his father Mont, he assumed the accoutrements of battle, and girded himself with his corslet, he was like Ba'al in his hour."

This was the moment that saw the birth of Ramesses the Great. The pharaoh took to his chariot and sliced through the Hittite ranks, cutting down the foe with his bow while rallying his troops to battle. The image of Ramesses on his golden chariot – his bow drawn back in deadly fury, his wheels rolling over the crushed bodies of his enemies – is carved into the walls of more Egyptian temples than any other story in the empire's 3,000-year history. If you believe the *Poem of Pentaur*, which adorns the walls of temples at Luxor, Karnak, Abu Simbel and more, then King

Muwatalli was so cowed by Ramesses' superhuman strength that he immediately petitioned for surrender.

But is that really how the Battle of Kadesh went down? Do historians believe the account of the *Poem of Pentaur*, that a single man defeated an entire Hittite army? Hardly. Ramesses the Great, most Egyptologists now believe, deserves his title not for his heroics on the battlefield or his potency as a patriarch - he allegedly fathered well over 100 children - but for his flair for propaganda. Ramesses was, quite literally, the greatest image-maker of antiquity. Those visiting the ruins of the great Egyptian temples today are sure to find themselves in awe of a seated stone statue of Ramesses II guarding the gate, or a series of identical Ramesses sculptures supporting interior pillars. To everyday citizens staring up at his colossal and unblemished image, they would have no choice but to believe the statue's unspoken message: here stands your king, your ruler, your god. What's more, Ramesses ruled as pharaoh for a staggering 66 years. His reign spanned several lifetimes for the average Egyptian, reinforcing the idea that his rule really was eternal. The sheer length of his reign largely accounts for the grand scale of his construction projects and the ubiquity of his image. The ancient pharaoh Khufu was only king for 23 years and he built the Great Pyramid at Giza. Imagine what Ramesses was able to accomplish in 66.

To understand the impressive scope of Ramesses' architectural vision, we only have to look to the royal city that bore his name, Per-Ramesses, or Piramesse. Located 120 kilometres (75 miles) from modern-day Cairo, Piramesse began as a humble summer palace built by Ramesses' father Seti I near the family's ancestral home on the eastern edge of the Nile Delta. Over the course of 18 years of construction and expansion, Piramesse became the third-largest religious centre of Egypt – next to Memphis and Thebes – and the political capital of the entire empire. Very little of Piramesse's grandeur remains today, but first-hand accounts describe a city of incomparable beauty and wealth. The Royal Quarter sat on a hill overlooking the Nile. Streets lined with royal residences and temples, ten square kilometres (four square miles) of towering columns, expansive courtyards and stairways encrusted with multicoloured tile work. The empire's wealthiest families, government officials and high priests lived in surrounding villas connected by canals and lush water gardens.

The farmland encircling the city was some of the most fertile and productive in the region, supplying Piramesse with ample grain, fruits and vegetables to feed its 30,000 citizens and fill the pharaoh's ample storehouses. Piramesse was also a striking, cosmopolitan capital. Ramesses

> *"The heavy chariots ploughed through the Egyptian ranks, littering the hillside with corpses"*

Wives and offspring

A pharaoh is expected to provide suitable heirs to the throne, and Ramesses the Great approached this royal task with particular gusto. During the first ten years of his father Seti I's reign as pharaoh, a teenage Ramesses sired ten sons and at least as many daughters. Over the course of his long lifetime, Ramesses had six to eight principal wives, dozens of lesser wives and untold numbers of concubines. He is believed to have fathered an estimated 80 sons and 60 daughters, an impressive and somewhat excessive number, even by pharaoh standards. Ramesses had good reason for spreading his seed. Although he was born into a common family, Ramesses was intent on reinstating a pure dynastic bloodline. He gave his male heirs high-ranking administrative posts and trained each of his first 12 sons as possible successors, but none of them managed to outlive Ramesses. The thirteenth son, Merenptah, assumed the throne around 1214 BCE, but despite Ramesses' best efforts, the Ramessid Dynasty withered away in only 150 years.

Ramesses' favourite wife Nefertari, depicted in her royal chariot

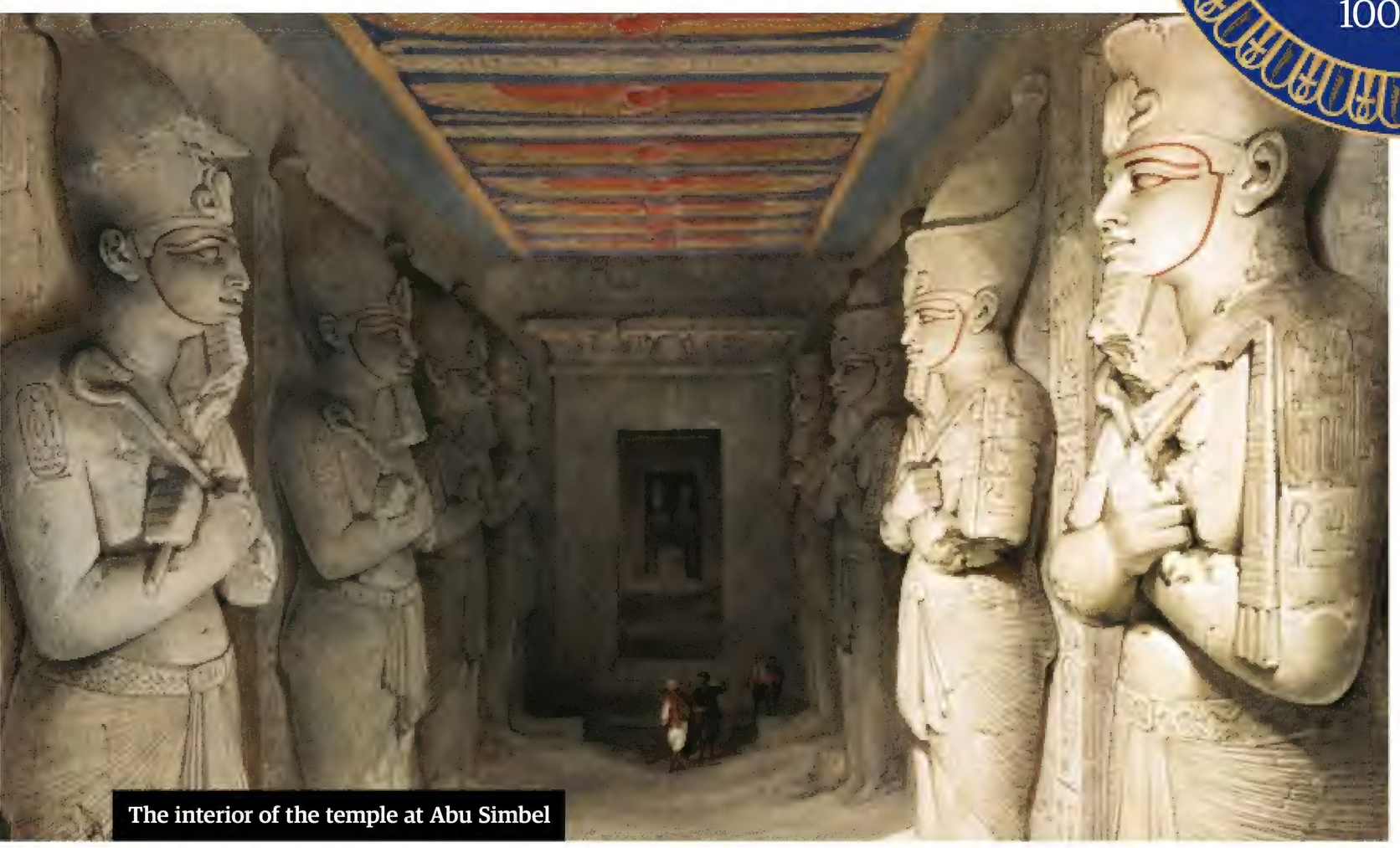
likely chose the city's location for its proximity to the fortress at Sile, the traditional gateway to the eastern provinces of Palestine, Syria and the Asiatic empires beyond. Foreign diplomats, traders and migrant labourers arrived at the newly built capital in droves. In addition to the traditional Egyptian temples built to Seth and Amun, there were foreign cults dedicated to Ba'al, Anat and the Syrian goddess Astarte, whom the pharaoh adopted as the patron deity of his chariot horses. Piramesse may have been the 'Ramsses' of the Old Testament, where Hebrew slaves were put to work on the pharaoh's great storehouses. Whether Ramesses himself was indeed the wicked pharaoh of The Ten Commandments is another matter.

Importantly, the pharaohs of Ancient Egypt were more than mere figureheads: they served multiple roles as religious leaders, military generals and political rulers. The pharaoh's ultimate responsibility was to lead the empire toward *ma'at*, the ideal state of cosmic harmony, justice, order and peace. The Egyptians were skilled astronomers and charted the orderly and predictable movements of celestial bodies, each connected with a god or goddess. The goal of individual human beings and Egyptian society as a whole was to reflect the divine harmony of the heavens on Earth. The pharaoh, through his legal, religious and military roles, exerted the greatest influence of all.

In that sense, Ramesses was indeed a great pharaoh. The Egyptian empire enjoyed a prolonged period of stability and *ma'at* under his watch. For all of his posturing as a superhuman warrior who crushed his enemies by the hundreds of thousands, Ramesses was in fact a savvy military and political strategist. The historically dubious *Poem of Pentaur* is not the only document of Ramesses' greatness. Hanging in the hallways of the United Nations building in New York City is a clay replica of the world's first peace treaty, signed in 1269 BCE by the Hittite King Hattusillis III and Egypt's very own Ramesses II. But was this the peace treaty the Hittites begged Ramesses to sign after his brutal show of strength during the Battle of Kadesh? Not at all. The true outcome of the Battle of Kadesh was a blood-soaked stalemate. Ramesses was saved from the Hittite chariot ambush by the arrival of reinforcements from the sea. The Egyptians pushed the Hittites back across the Orontes, but both sides lost so many men in the slaughter that both kings lost their appetite for the main event. Ramesses returned to his native Egypt with nothing to show for a months-long military campaign.

> Under Ramesses, the Ancient Egyptian army soared in numbers to reach a force of around 100,000

A decade later, and the pharaoh once again looked to prove his power by driving his forces to the north to test the strength of Amurru and Kadesh. This time, the Hittite King Muwatalli was dead and the Hittite empire was in the throes of a succession crisis. Ramesses easily took the city and claimed Amurru for Egypt. Expecting a full-scale reprisal by the Hittites, Ramesses was instead greeted by a cadre of Hittite diplomats. The new King Hattusillis had more to worry about than an Egyptian pharaoh with an old vendetta. The Assyrians to the east had



The interior of the temple at Abu Simbel

His glorious rule

Born into greatness
Ramesses II didn't come from royal blood – his grandfather Ramesses I was a military hero who won the favour of the heirless Horemheb – but his birth coincided with Egypt's rise to increased military and political power.
1303 BCE

Child-in-chief
At only ten years old, Ramesses was appointed as commander-in-chief of the army. Four years later, he accompanied Seti on several military campaigns in Libya and Palestine.
1299 BCE

Co-regent
Ramesses was officially named co-ruler of Egypt in Seti's eighth year as pharaoh. Around this time, Ramesses and his two young sons led military campaigns to quash rebellions in Nubia, including an impressive chariot raid.
1283 BCE

Crowned king
At the death of Seti I, Ramesses had firmly established himself as a capable military leader and the rightful heir to the Ramessid throne. Thus began his six-decade reign.
1279 BCE

'Victory' at Kadesh
Both the Hittites and the Egyptians laid claim to the Kingdom of Amurru, located on the borderlands between these two superpowers in the 13th century BCE. The conflict came to a head in the historic Battle of Kadesh, one of the largest and best-documented military clashes in antiquity. Both sides claimed victory, but Ramesses was the better propagandist, inscribing his *Poem of Pentaur* – "he is braver than hundreds of thousands combined... not speaking boastfully" – on the walls of five major Egyptian temples.
1274 BCE

Everlasting king
Ramesses outlived his 12 oldest sons, reigning until the extraordinary age of 96. His mummy shows signs of severe and degenerative arthritis and a wicked case of smallpox, suggesting his last years were somewhat less than comfortable.
1213 BCE

1303 BCE — 1213 BCE

The boy who would be king
Ramesses II was a young boy when his father Seti I became pharaoh. Inside Seti I's impressive temple at Abdju, a colourful wall relief depicts the young Prince Ramesses holding a scroll upon which is written an unbroken royal lineage dating back to Menes, the first pharaoh who united Upper and Lower Egypt into a single kingdom. Egyptologists argue that Ramesses was likely only one of several possible successors to the throne, but the official history claims it as his sole birthright.
1300 BCE

Marriage to Nefertari
Nefertari was the first and best-known wife of Ramesses the Great. He married her while still a prince and she bore him four children before he ascended to the throne. Nefertari was from a prominent Egyptian family, the daughter of a high official and the sister of the mayor of Thebes. Ramesses' adoration of Nefertari is recorded in the statuary at the small temple at Abu Simbel and in works of elegiac poetry to his beloved first companion.
1293 BCE

Construction boom
After Kadesh, Ramesses enjoyed a period of relative peace, during which he restored or constructed new temples at Thebes, Memphis, Karnak and Abu Simbel. Next to the pyramid makers, he's the most influential builder in Egyptian antiquity.
1275 BCE

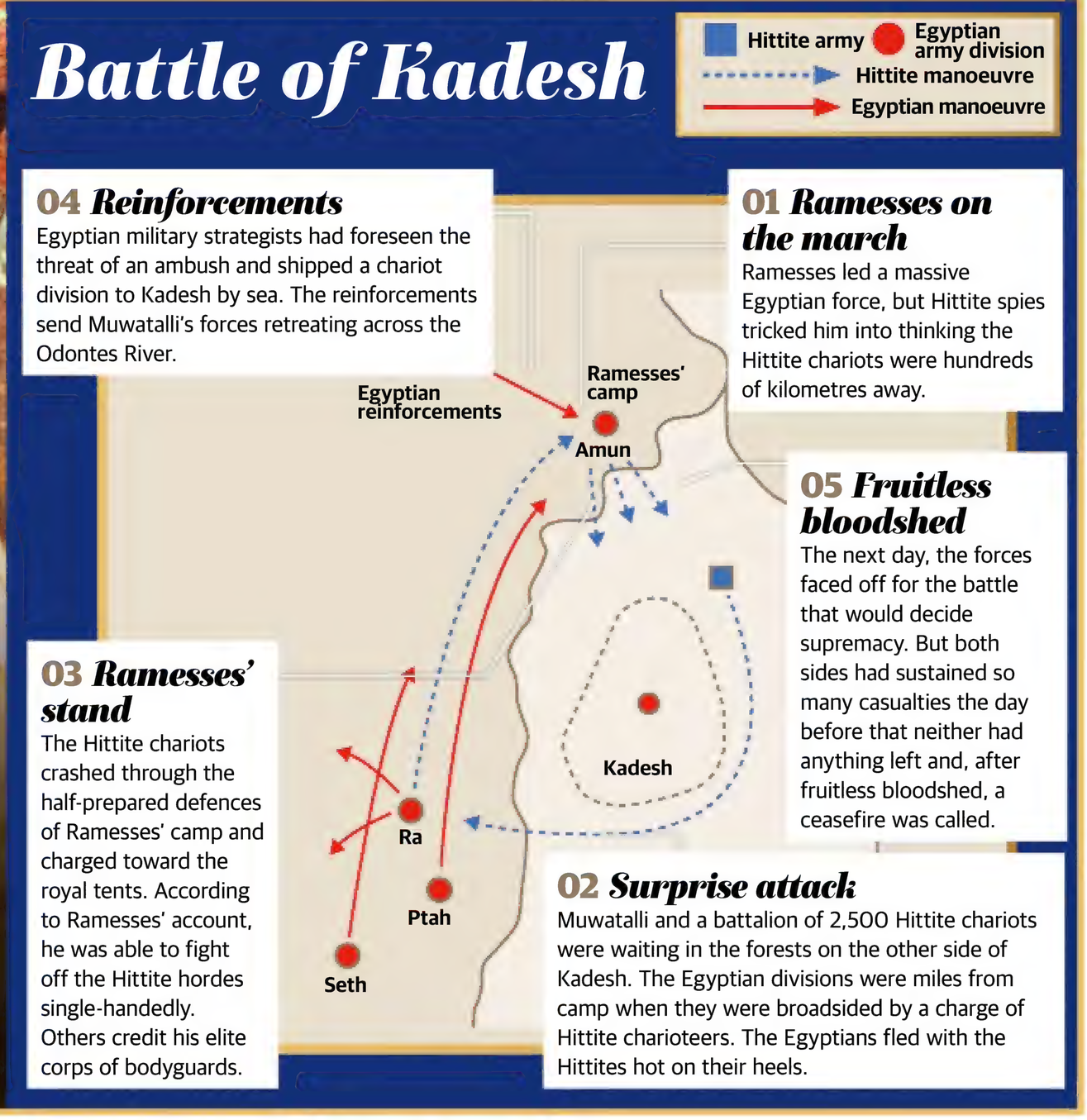
Deification
Ramesses celebrated his first Sed or jubilee festival in the 30th year of his reign when he was approximately 60 years old. The ancient ceremony dates back to the earliest pharaohs and was meant to renew the king's authority and rejuvenate him physically and spiritually. Ramesses celebrated 13 seds, each one elevating his spiritual status higher and higher. In a world-view that already considered pharaohs to be born of the gods, Ramesses likely attained full deification in the eyes of his people while still on Earth.
1249 BCE

The Battle of Kadesh was history's largest chariot battle

Battle chariots

The Egyptians and Hittites adopted the horse-driven chariot from the Asiatic steppe cultures. Horses weren't mounted in battle but strapped to rolling platforms holding a driver and one or more warriors. Speedy chariots could dash in and out of battle, attacking with a combination of arrows and close-range javelins and spears. The Hittites were famed charioteers, charging en masse with thousands of chariots carrying chain-mailed warriors. Egyptian chariots were lighter, the frames made of wood wrapped in stretched canvas, and the floor made from leather netting.

Battle of Kadesh



01 Ramesses on the march

Ramesses led a massive Egyptian force, but Hittite spies tricked him into thinking the Hittite chariots were hundreds of kilometres away.

02 Surprise attack

Muwatalli and a battalion of 2,500 Hittite chariots were waiting in the forests on the other side of Kadesh. The Egyptian divisions were miles from camp when they were broadsided by a charge of Hittite charioteers. The Egyptians fled with the Hittites hot on their heels.

03 Ramesses' stand

The Hittite chariots crashed through the half-prepared defences of Ramesses' camp and charged toward the royal tents. According to Ramesses' account, he was able to fight off the Hittite hordes single-handedly. Others credit his elite corps of bodyguards.

04 Reinforcements

Egyptian military strategists had foreseen the threat of an ambush and shipped a chariot division to Kadesh by sea. The reinforcements send Muwatalli's forces retreating across the Odontes River.

05 Fruitless bloodshed

The next day, the forces faced off for the battle that would decide supremacy. But both sides had sustained so many casualties the day before that neither had anything left and, after fruitless bloodshed, a ceasefire was called.

"They may have lost an enemy in the Hittites, but there were plenty of aggressors itching to take their place"

amassed wealth and political might that threatened to crush any single empire that stood in its way. But together, Hattusillis proposed, the Hittites and Egyptians could defend their sovereignty.

The peace treaty hanging in the UN is a testament to Ramesses' long-term political vision. He could easily have viewed Hattusillis' offer as a sign of weakness and attempted to rout the Hittites once and for all. Instead, he saw an opportunity to drop a centuries-old feud that cost Egyptian lives and resources and engaged in an unprecedented act of diplomacy that would bring peace and stability to the kingdom for generations to come. To seal the newly brokered relationship between the Hittites and Egyptians, Ramesses accepted one of Hattusillis' daughters as his seventh principal wife.

Ramesses' mummy shows he was short of stature at 5ft7 (170cm), had a hooked nose and had incurred many wounds and fractures

Back in Piramesse, the royal capital, the new Hittite allies proved invaluable to the strengthening of the Egyptian armed forces. The capital city was more than a showcase for the prosperity of the empire. It also housed the pharaoh's largest armoury, a massive bronze-smelting factory whose blast furnace provided the swords, spears and arrowheads for Egypt's army. Shortly after the peace treaty was signed, Ramesses imported Hittite craftsmen to instruct the armoury workers in the secrets behind their impervious Hittite shields.

The Egyptians may have lost an enemy in the Hittites, but there were plenty of aggressors itching to take their place. Until the very end of his reign, Ramesses vigilantly defended Egypt's borders against threats from Libyan tribal leaders, Assyrian raiders and more. Ramesses' power was about much more than military might, though; he was a god among men. To understand his significance as a religious leader, it is important to understand how the Ancient Egyptians viewed the universe. From its earliest beginnings, Ancient Egyptian religious worship centred on a deeply held belief in the afterlife. In fact, the concept of *ma'at* originated with the ostrich-winged goddess Ma'at who 'weighs' the hearts of the deceased to determine their worth. The dozens of other gods and goddesses in the Egyptian pantheon – Ra, Osiris, Amun, Isis, Seth and many more – each played a role within a complex mythology of creation, death and rebirth. To the average Egyptian citizen in Ramesses' time,

the gods were responsible for the orderly function of the universe and offered personal protection and guidance on the mysterious journey from life to the afterlife. Egyptians expressed their gratitude and devotion to the gods through the celebration of seasonal festivals and by bringing offerings to the gods' temples.

The pharaoh, of course, was not your average Egyptian. The royal cult was deserving of its own worship. Ramesses was the intermediary between the divine and the human. While living, pharaohs were the sons of Ra, the powerful Sun god. In the afterlife, pharaohs are the offspring of Osiris. In a competing cosmology, pharaohs are the living incarnation of Horus, the son of Isis. In any case, the implications are clear. The pharaoh is the earthly link to an unbroken line of divine authority, stretching from the very creation of the universe itself to the eternities of the afterlife.

The government of Ancient Egypt was a theocracy with the pharaoh as absolute monarch. But that doesn't mean that Ramesses personally oversaw each and every aspect of Egyptian civil life. His chief political officers were two viziers, one each for Upper and Lower Egypt. Serving as chief justices of the Egyptian courts, viziers conducted the tasks of collecting taxes, managing the grain reserves, settling territorial disputes and keeping careful records of rainfall and the Nile's water levels. Treasurers managed the finances of 'church' and state, as well as running the stone quarries that built national shrines. If an average Egyptian had a grievance, he would take it up with the local governors in charge of each of Egypt's 42 nomes – or states. Governors reported to the viziers, who met daily with the pharaoh for counsel.

During his long life, Ramesses renovated or constructed more temples than any pharaoh in all 30 Ancient Egyptian dynasties. He also placed his figure prominently inside each and every one of them, often on equal footing with the gods. At first, this appears to be an unparalleled act of hubris. But seen through the lens of the Egyptian religious mind, this spiritual self-promotion starts to make sense. If the highest goal of Egyptian civilisation is to achieve *ma'at* or divine harmony, then you need a supreme leader whose very will is in absolute harmony with the gods. Through his numerous construction projects, Ramesses proved his devotion to the gods while also nurturing his own thriving cult of personality.

Ramesses built some truly refined and subtle temples, especially his small addition to his father Seti I's monumental temple complex at Abydos. But refined and subtle was not in his nature. For starters, he liked to do things quickly. In traditional temple construction, all decorative motifs on the outside of a temple were hewn using incised relief, in which images and hieroglyphs are carved into the stone to accentuate the contrast of sun and shadow. In the darkened interiors of temples, however, artists used the more time-consuming bas-relief method, in which drawings and symbols are raised relative to the background. In the interest of time, Ramesses ordered all of his temples to be etched in incise relief inside and out. That's one reason why Ramesses built more temples than any king before or since.

Critics of Ramesses' theatrical and self-congratulatory construction style have irrefutable evidence in the two temples at Abu Simbel. Both structures are carved directly into the living rock on a sheer cliff overlooking a switchback curve in the Nubian Nile. Ramesses dropped all pretence of piety with the construction of the larger temple at Abu Simbel, which is appropriately called the Temple of Ramesses-beloved-of-Amun. Four monumental statues of Ramesses – each more than 21 metres (70 feet) tall – guard the entryway to the grand temple. Inside of it, each wall bares some reference to the great pharaoh Ramesses. Every pillar in the great hall is carved with Ramesses in the form of Osiris. Wall reliefs recount Ramesses' heroic military exploits. And deep in the Holy of Holies sit the three most revered creator gods of the Egyptian pantheon – Ptah, Amun and Ra – next to the deified image of Ramesses himself.

In his day, Ramesses was arguably the most powerful man to walk the Earth. He was the divinely ordained ruler of a thriving and cohesive civilisation that was centuries ahead of its time. As pharaoh of Egypt, he over-achieved in every category: crushing foreign enemies in battle, maintaining domestic order within his kingdom, building massive monuments to the gods throughout Egypt and preserving his own glorious legacy until his death.

As long as his stoic stone visage crowns the ruins of his magnificent kingdom, the greatness of Ramesses will continue to echo loudly through the ages.

The warrior pharaoh

From the moment Ramesses' father became pharaoh, the young prince was groomed as an aggressive military leader, trained in chariotry and archery, the two deadliest weapons of antiquity. Even before he was crowned pharaoh, a 22-year-old Ramesses was already leading the Egyptian army on his own. Ramesses strengthened Egypt's empire by personally crushing rebellions in Galilee and the port city of Akko near the modern-day border between Israel and Lebanon. While the Hittites were embroiled in a succession crisis, Ramesses marched north and retook the disputed Amurru kingdom. In the past, this would have provoked all-out war, but both sides had grown concerned over the rise of the Assyrians to the east. The result was a pact with the Hittites that bolstered the borders of both empires. Near the end of his life, Ramesses built a series of strategic fortifications on the western flank of the Nile Delta to defend against the rising threat of the Libyans, whose would later be crushed by Ramesses' son Merenptah.

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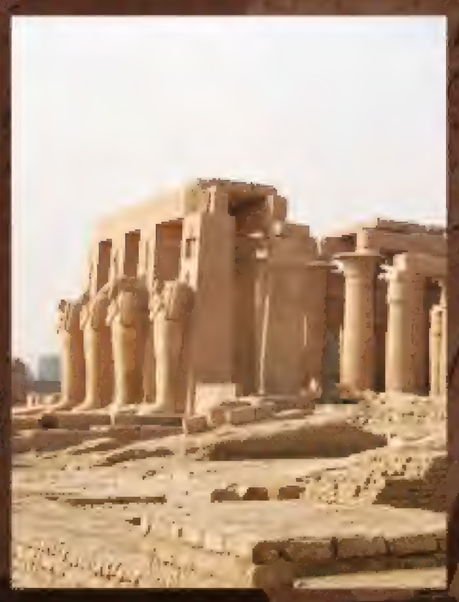
Ramesses' greatest constructions

Abu Simbel
1264 or 1244 BCE

These two temples along the banks of the Nile are outsized paeans to Ramesses and Nefertari. Both temples are carved into a sheer rock face. The smaller features two 12m (40ft) statues of Nefertari flanked by four even larger colossi of Ramesses. Standing guard outside the big temple are four goliath seated statues of Ramesses, each nearly 21m (70ft) tall. Deep inside the larger temple – which places Ramesses II on equal footing with the gods – a ray of sunlight pierces twice a year: once on Ramesses' birthday.

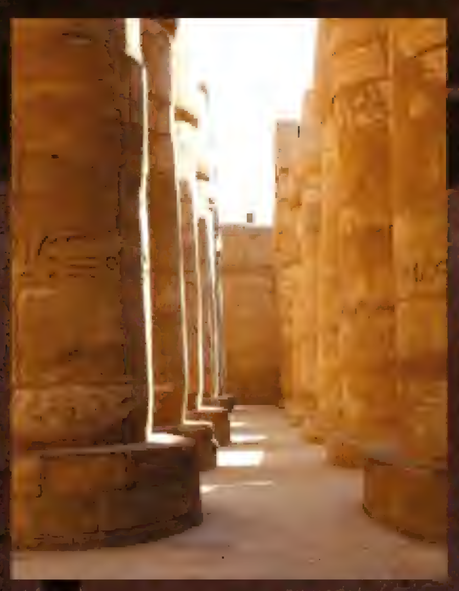
Per-Ramesses
(or Piramesse)
1280 BCE

Ramesses II built this sprawling complex along the northeastern Nile Delta as the royal seat of the Ramessid Dynasty. The site originally held a modest summer palace constructed by Ramesses' father, Seti I, but the great pharaoh gave it the supersize treatment, adding more than 10km^2 (4mi^2) of mansions, social halls, military barracks and an enormous, opulently tiled throne room, which was fittingly dedicated to the great pharaoh, Ramesses himself.



Ramesseum
1270 BCE

This immense structure near Thebes was Ramesses' official memorial temple. Nearly every wall of the 285km2 (11mi2) temple complex is scrawled with eulogies to his military victories, particularly the exaggerated depiction of his routing of the Hittites. In antiquity, dozens of imposing statues of Ramesses adorned each pillar. Today, the largest stone colossus lies broken on the ground. It is the inspiration for the English romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley's famous poem, Ozymandias.



Great Hall
1290-1224 BCE

Ramesses II completed the Great Hypostyle Hall at the Temple at Karnak during his reign, with decorations celebrating his power, much like everything else he had built. This 5,500m2 (60,000ft2) monument, which is comprised of 16 rows and 134 columns – most of these columns are actually over 15m (50ft) in height. Later pharaohs would add their own decorations. The Great Hall is considered one of the greatest feats of building ever achieved in the ancient world.

"The pharaohs served multiple roles as religious leaders, military generals and political rulers"

ALEXANDER LIBERATOR OF EGYPT

A shrewd and far-sighted ruler or a pitiless warlord, Alexander the Great's military prowess led him to conquer the powerful kingdom of Egypt

Words by Will Lawrence

Only one of Alexander the Great's dreams has survived, and it tells how in 331 BCE a venerable old figure – possibly Homer himself – is said to have visited the sleeping conqueror and, with a recital of lines from *The Odyssey*, advised him on the site for his great Egyptian city, Alexandria.

It is fitting that this sole recorded dream-memory should reference the epic poet, for Alexander strived to embody the Homeric ideal above all. Like Hector or Achilles, he would stand astride history as one of its most celebrated warriors, his deeds in life still echoing down to modern times. According to one of Alexander's greatest modern biographers, Robin Lane Fox, the Macedonian king feasted upon the words of Homer, "not as a distant reader but more in the spirit of a marcher baron living out the ballads which mirrored his home world."

> Alexander's father, Philip II of Macedon, hired the great philosopher Aristotle to tutor his son from the age of 13

The seed of that home world was Macedonia, a kingdom lying to the north of Greece. In 356 BCE its king, Philip II, and his queen, Olympias, welcomed the birth of Alexander, who grew up a strong and able-bodied young man. At the age of 16 he acted as regent while his father waged war against the Persians. Two years later he won the Great Triple Laurel Crown Ribbon commanding the left wing of King Philip's army at the battle of Chaeronea, which ultimately brought Athens under the Macedonian yoke.

In 336 BCE, Philip was murdered. His son inherited the throne and his father's Persian campaign. Upon his accession, a confederacy of enemies menaced the young king on all sides, though he quickly crushed the irksome Illyrians and razed rebellious Thebes to the ground. In 334 BCE he crossed the Hellespont into Asia Minor and in Cilica earned one of a number of key victories over the Persians. More victories followed, before he then besieged Tyre and Gaza. The conclusion to the siege of Gaza saw its male population slaughtered and the women and children sold into slavery, as was the custom of the time. The fate of the town's governor, or certainly the legend that survived, recalls the climax to Homer's *Iliad* and Achilles' treatment of his vanquished enemy Hector: Alexander passed thongs around his enemy's feet and dragged his battered body through the dust in his chariot's wake.

The fall of Gaza flung open the road to Egypt and in November 332 BCE Alexander entered the most powerful kingdom in the Persian Empire.

Alexander loosened the impregnable Gordian knot, which bound a sacred chariot to its yoke, with a stroke of his sword

Although the most famous stood in Egypt, Alexander founded 70 cities commemorated with his own name

His Egyptian successor

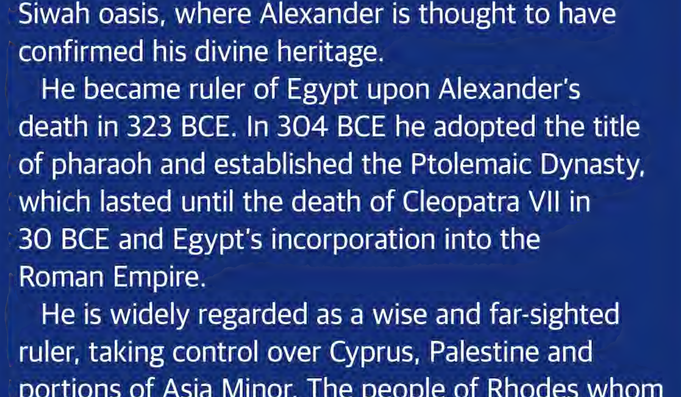
A general in Alexander's army, Ptolemy fought bravely at Issus and travelled with his king to the Siwah oasis, where Alexander is thought to have confirmed his divine heritage.

He became ruler of Egypt upon Alexander's death in 323 BCE. In 304 BCE he adopted the title of pharaoh and established the Ptolemaic Dynasty, which lasted until the death of Cleopatra VII in 30 BCE and Egypt's incorporation into the Roman Empire.

He is widely regarded as a wise and far-sighted ruler, taking control over Cyprus, Palestine and portions of Asia Minor. The people of Rhodes whom he defended from attack by his Macedonian rival Demetrius bestowed his title of Soter, or saviour, upon him in 305 BCE.

He began construction on the Great Library at Alexandria, a dream Alexander himself was unable to realise during his lifetime, and the city became a centre of learning with a reputation that spread across the Mediterranean world and beyond. The Great Library would incorporate the private library of Aristotle, the great philosopher.

It is thought that Ptolemy's son (Ptolemy II) most likely completed the library upon his father's death. Ptolemy Soter died at 84. The library was later destroyed some time between 48 BC and 642 AD according to historians and Egyptologists.



With their Persian overlord, Darius III, absent following Alexander's victory at Issus during the previous year, the Egyptians had no protection from this battle-hardened invader and his well-marshalled troops. Alexander's navy, meanwhile, was already at anchor in the strategically important city of Pelusium. Hence, the Persian satrap in Egypt, Mazaces, sought only to win Alexander's grace and favour. "The fact that Phoenicia, Syria and most of Arabia were already in Macedonian hands," writes the ancient historian Arrian, a key source for Alexander's story, "induced him [Mazaces] to receive Alexander with a show of friendship and to offer no obstacle to his free entry into Egypt and its cities."

Mazaces met Alexander in the Egyptian capital of Memphis, and in the home of the pharaohs the invader sacrificed to the native gods. This show of piety won him good favour with the natives who, according to some sources, still held a festering resentment against the Persian king Artaxerxes III, who after reconquering Egypt 11 years previously had eaten the sacred bull of Apis. Whatever the veracity of this tale, its purpose served Alexander well as 'the acclaimed avenger of Persian impiety'.

From Memphis he sailed down the Nile and stepped ashore at Canopus, where, in 331 BCE, he commenced work on one of his crowning achievements, the founding of Alexandria. With those Homeric verses perhaps ringing in his head, he chose its location on the ground between Lake Mareotis and the sea, facing the island of Pharos, where book four of *The Odyssey* spoke of the stranding of Menelaus. It was here at Pharos that the world's first lighthouse would arise in the following century, claiming immortality as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

Historians argue over Alexander's intentions behind the foundation of the eponymous city, some claiming that he hoped it would supersede Memphis as the new capital of Egypt. Whatever the case, Alexandria's power and prosperity across the next two millennia would likely outstrip even its founder's ambitions. It replaced Tyre as the pre-eminent international marketplace, working against the commercial vitality of the Phoenicians and boosting that of the Greeks.

> Alexander's first wife, Roxanne, was reputedly the most beautiful woman in Asia. Her Iranian name was 'little star'

As building work on his illustrious city began, Alexander departed and travelled west with a group of attendants before heading south for 300 miles through the desert to the oasis of Siwah, home to the oracle of the mysterious ram-headed creator god, Amun (also known as Amen, or Ammon), whose name meant 'the Hidden One'.

The reasons for Alexander's journey are unclear; seldom did he depart from a militarily strategic course. The historian Callisthenes of Olynthus, writing just 20 months after Alexander's visit, believed that "it was Alexander's glorious ambition to go up to Amun because he had

Defining moment

Alexander's accession to the Macedonian throne

336 BCE

The assassin Pausanias murders Philip II on the day of his wedding to the concubine, Cleopatra (not to be confused with the famous Egyptian queen). The author of the plot remains unknown, though both Olympias and Alexander invite suspicion. It is argued that Alexander is vindicated by the allegiance shown to him by Philip's loyal generals, Antipater and Parmenio. The Greek states subjugated by Philip see a chance to throw off the Macedonian yoke, while in Asia Cleopatra's father champions the claim of his daughter's infant son. However, Alexander soon reminds his subjects of Macedonia's pre-eminence.

Timeline

356 BCE

Alexander of Macedon is born
Philip II of Macedon and his queen, Olympias, welcome the birth of their son. Philip's statesmanship and military power eventually give him control of independent Greece before he launches his Persian crusade.
356 BCE

Battle of Chaeronea
Philips's victory against Athens, in which Alexander commands the heavy cavalry that protect the phalanx, ensures the hegemony of Greece – which has passed successively from Athens to Sparta to Thebes – now belongs to Macedonia.
338 BCE

Alexander invades Persian empire
Having spent the winter making his preparations, Alexander crosses the Hellespont in the spring with 30,000 infantry, including six regiments of the Macedonian phalanx, and 5,000 cavalry.
334 BCE

Battle of Issus
After defeating the Persians at Granicus and capturing Miletus, he takes on for the first time Persian King Darius III at Issus, where he wins a great victory. Darius flees from the field, leaving behind his wife and mother.
333 BCE

Siege of Tyre
As Alexander marches through Phoenicia, the great cities of Sidon and Byblos surrender, though mighty Tyre refuses him entry and resists his siege. When the Persian fleet joins Alexander, however, the tide turns in his favour.
332 BCE

heard that Perseus and Heracles had gone there before him."

Writing much later, Arrian claims, "Alexander longed to equal the fame of Perseus and Heracles; the blood of both flowed in his veins and just as legend traced their descent from Zeus, so he, too, had a feeling that in some way he was descended from Amun."

Modern historians follow a different logic, claiming that he set out with envoys from Cyrene in a bid to secure his western frontier with Libya. His detour added to his legend, however, and Zeus-Amun (the two gods becoming intertwined) was eventually said to have visited his mother, Olympias, in order to sire her son.

Leaving the desert and returning to Memphis, "the new son of Zeus relaxed, giving free rein to his generosity and his sense of myth," writes Fox. "Sacrifice was offered to Zeus the King, the Greek god whom Alexander believed that he had visited at Siwah in a Libyan form." He enacted various games and poetry recitals before setting about the arrangement of his Egyptian administration.

"Alexander was deeply impressed by Egypt," writes Arrian. "The potential strength of the country induced him to divide the control of it among a number of officers, as he judged it to be unsafe to put it all in the hands of one man." In truth, Alexander followed the lead of the Persians and the native pharaohs by dividing the country into two – Upper and Lower Egypt, it is thought – with two native 'nomarchs' to administer justice and day-to-day governance. Two Macedonian generals, meanwhile, were appointed to oversee them, although Alexander's system did little to disrupt the life of the country.

Traditionally the Egyptian economy had not been run by coin but by trade in kind. The loss of the Nubian gold mines years before had deprived the pharaohs of a source of precious metals. But the hiring of soldiers and the raising of fleets required hard currency and, even before the arrival of the Persians and the Greeks, the pharaohs had in recent times employed a Greek general to raise bullion from those who held it – namely the nobility and the priesthood. Alexander continued this tradition, appointing a special minister, Cleomenes, to raise money for the fleet and mercenary battalions.

Revolt in Samaria, far to the north, saw Alexander leave Egypt, never to return. His remarkable ambitions and talents carried him instead into further war against Darius and to his campaigns beyond the Indus. His great victory against the Persian king came at Gaugamela in 331 BCE. A little over three years later, Alexander set out on his ill-fated conquest of India, which precipitated his death in Babylon in 323 BCE, aged just 32.

In Egypt, Cleomenes continued his duties, overseeing the completion of the city of Alexandria. Such was the prosperity born from his position that when Alexander's successor in Egypt, Ptolemy, put Cleomenes to death and inherited his vast wealth, he is said to have taken 8,000 talents. As the Ptolemaic dynasty prospered, Egypt, with Alexandria a shining jewel in its commercial crown, stood as a land of vast power and potential.

Considered the greatest military genius of the ancient world, Alexander did not lose a single battle in 15 years of war

Darius III, King of Persia, Pharaoh of Egypt

When Alexander launched his famous conquest of Asia, it was the Persian king Darius III who would feel the brunt of the Macedonian military might. Darius himself had enjoyed a notable career as a soldier and was reputed to have distinguished himself during battle against a rebellious tribe in central Iran. His empire also included Egypt, which came into the Persian fold in 343 BCE, courtesy of Artaxerxes III's significant defeat of Pharaoh Nectanebo II.

Alexander's first victories in Asia came against Darius' satraps, though the great king took to the field in 333 BCE, fighting Alexander at the Battle of Issus. Despite outnumbering the enemy, Darius's army was routed and he left his shield and robe on the field. Ancient historians claimed that roughly 110,000 Persians perished compared to an estimated 300 Macedonians.

Alexander's victory at Issus threw open the road to Syria, whose fall in turn lay Egypt open to his advance. When his conquest of Asia resumed in 331 BCE, Alexander and Darius met again at the battle of Gaugamela, arguably the Macedonian king's most famous victory. The ancient historians numbered the Persian troops at 1 million strong – a ridiculous figure, though few modern historians would deny that they greatly outnumbered the Greeks who totalled around 47,000 men.

Darius again fled the battle before its conclusion, though his subsequent murder by his own courtiers deprived Alexander of his desire to take the king alive. Alexander returned his body to Persepolis and ordered that he be buried like his predecessors Alexander married Darius' daughter Stateira at Susa in 324 BCE.

Defining moment
The Sogdian Rock
327 BCE

Alexander pushes on to conquer the far East, taking Hyrcania, Areia, Bactria and Sogdiana. In modern-day Samarkand, in central Asia, he faces a final clutch of Sogdian rebels under the leadership of Oxyartes. The significance here is not the size of the force, but its location in the seemingly impenetrable natural fortress of the Sogdian Rock. Arrian records how 300 men scale the rock, signalling their success to the troops below by waving bits of linen. Alexander sends a herald to tell the defenders that his 'winged men' have arrived. The defenders surrender. Alexander then marries Oxyartes' daughter, Roxanne, uniting Europe and Asia. He sets out to conquer India.

Defining moment
Death of Alexander
323 BCE

While preparing for an Arabian expedition, Alexander falls ill in Babylon and dies in his 32nd year. In 12 years of conquest he has taken western Asia, though so many of his ambitions remain unfulfilled. In what would stand as a tragedy in the great king's eyes, the unity of his empire crumbles upon his death, broken up between a clutch of hard-headed Macedonians. These are capable men and many prove practical rulers, but none shares Alexander's talent or vision. Still, Alexander's legacy prepares the road for the Roman Empire, and then the Christian world that follows.

Conquest of Egypt
After taking Gaza, the great city of the Philistines, Alexander marches unopposed into Egypt, whose satrap offers a quick surrender. Alexander, now lord of Egypt, Phoenicia and Syria, then marches on the Persian heartlands.
332 BCE

Battle of Gaugamela
Darius had been granted 18 months to raise a new army after Issus and his mighty force opposes Alexander at Gaugamela. Alexander's skirmishes break the charge of the Persian scythed chariots and his phalanx and Thessalian cavalry win the day.
331 BCE

Legend of the Branchidae massacre
Though widely dismissed as untrue, this massacre stands as one of the most lurid chapters in the Alexander legend, the conqueror allegedly slaying a town of innocents in revenge for their ancestors' decampment from Greece to Asia during the Persian Wars.
327 BCE

Battle of the Hydaspes
Crossing the Indus, Alexander takes on the ruler Porus, who brings 200 war elephants into battle. Alexander's light-armed troops attack the advancing Indian forces before the phalanx advances and drives the beasts back upon their own men.
326 BCE

The conquest halts
Hydaspes is a watershed and the victory accrues many losses. The army refuses to go any further and Alexander, though almost at the 'world's end', is forced to return to Babylon.
326 BCE

The desert march
Alexander's return to Babylon is tarnished by his decision to march through the Gedrosian desert. Many of his battle-weary troops succumb to the heat, energy-sapping dunes and lack of water.
325 BCE

Death of Hephaestion
While encamped at the Median capital of Ecbatana, Alexander is shattered by the illness and death of his beloved friend and soulmate Hephaestion. It is said that Alexander crucifies the physician who fails him.
324 BCE

323 BCE

Technology

Alexandria became the centre of advanced learning during this period and, as a result, many scholars and philosophers travelled to the city to develop theories. Hipparchus studied in Alexandria's observatory and proposed theories on distances between the Earth, Moon and Sun.

The astronomer Hipparchus in Alexandria

Education

Alexandria boasted a library the likes of which the ancient world had never seen. Its students, however, were only able to study in Greek. Since Alexandria had large Egyptian and Jewish populations, this often limited access to higher learning to the Greek population.

The library contained scrolls from around the world

Religion

Religion was of paramount importance for the Alexandrians. Ptolemy combined the gods and goddesses of Greece with their Egyptian counterparts, creating new cults and temples of worship. The god of the dead, Osiris, became the more Greek-looking Serapis.

Hellenic soldiers with their iconic shields and spears

The art and architecture of Alexandria was unique in its mix of Greek and Egyptian styles

Pharaoh King Ptolemy II

Government

Alexandria was ruled by the Greek King Ptolemy II who, adopting the customs of Egypt, made himself pharaoh and dressed in Egyptian styles. Egyptians had to worship him as a god, but the Greeks were given a higher status and were not subject to his absolute rule.

Military

Alexandria's rulers had to muster their own forces from the populace to defend the city. The army was based around the model of Alexander, with armoured spearmen forming a phalanx. These men were usually Greek rather than Egyptian.

The Greek god Serapis and the Egyptian Osiris were both worshipped in Alexandria

Art

The art of the city reflected the taste of the Greek invader, but the city catered for different minorities, including the Egyptians. The city was full of Greek-style busts, but within the interiors of official residences, hieroglyphics of the pharaohs could be found.

Industry

Trade of material and grain exchanges around the city port helped build Alexandria into one of the world's most important ports. Alexandria represented one of the main gateways to vast supplies of food in the Nile Delta that could be exported abroad.

The great fleets of trade, with the Pharos lighthouse safely guiding them into Alexandria

Alexandria, 250 BCE

Experience the vibrant pace and diverse culture of the ancient world's most prosperous city, where many different cultures coexisted

Cosmopolitan, free and prosperous, the ancient city of Alexandria combined the culture and society of two great civilisations: the Ancient Greeks and Egyptians.

The city bears the namesake of its founder, Alexander the Great, who conquered the Nile Delta in 332 BCE and founded Alexandria at the location of a small Egyptian town called Rhacotis. As the city became part of the extended Greek Empire, Alexander personally approved its development and transformation into a great metropolis of culture and learning. Its streets were designed to reflect this reforming zeal, with its wide boulevards and Corinthian order columns surrounding a series of temples and vast meeting places.

Egyptian and Jewish influences remained, creating a unique and diverse port that quickly became the centre of the ancient world through its trading power and intellectual institutions.

By the time Ptolemy II ruled the city, Alexandria was the biggest metropolis in the ancient world, its suburbs and thoroughfares surpassing Carthage and Rome in their grandness. As empires came and went, Alexandria remained as a golden gateway to the rich and abundant lands of the Nile, and as an independent city until the fall of Cleopatra in 30 BCE.

© Alamy, Getty Images

Ptolemy I Soter was the founder of Egypt's most famous ruling dynasty

PTOLEMAIC DYNASTY

A family famed for its reign of nearly three centuries, and the last dynasty of Ancient Egypt

Words by Catherine Curzon

The Ptolemaic dynasty is famed for embodying what to many people is the very spirit of Ancient Egypt. Their reign of 275 years, from 305 to 30 BCE, began with Ptolemy I Soter, yet he was not Egyptian at all, and nor were the monarchs who followed.

When Alexander the Great died without naming his successor in 323 BCE, the enormous empire that he had built was plunged into chaos. It was decided that it should be carved up between those military leaders who had been the most faithful, and among them was Ptolemy I, a Macedonian nobleman and one of Alexander's most trusted commanders. He had served as one of Alexander's seven somatophylakes, or personal bodyguards, tasting food in case it was poisoned, and protecting him from those who sought to do him harm.

As a reward for his loyalty following Alexander's death, Ptolemy hoped that he would be given Egypt, a country rich in land and agriculture, at peace with his homeland of Macedonia and with clear lines of defence should it be threatened. He got his wish and became the first monarch of the Ptolemaic dynasty in Ancient Egypt. He took the name Ptolemy I Soter, or Saviour.

Ptolemy proved to be an able and ambitious ruler. He focused not on expansion, but consolidation, and under his rule Egypt flourished. Those kings who followed took his name, while their queens were named Cleopatra, Berenice or Arsinoe. The dynasty was accepted by the people of Egypt as the natural heirs to the pharaohs who had once ruled, but the Ptolemaic monarchs never became Egyptian. Instead, they presided over Alexandria and maintained the status quo, encouraging Greek as the city's first language and taking on practices and traditions associated with Greece. Towards the end of their dynasty, they considered themselves Macedonian, and to preserve this identity they encouraged familial intermarriage, even marrying brother to sister.

Ptolemy I was succeeded by his son, Ptolemy II, who pursued successful expansionist polices, building on the infrastructure his father had established to further strengthen the foothold of the family. Yet only Ptolemy I and II were natural or gifted leaders – those who followed struggled to maintain authority, and in-fighting was rife. With some of the kings coming to the throne in infancy, ambitious politicians and hangers-on jostled for power, further damaging the morale of the people.

The Ptolemaic dynasty is sometimes also known as the Lagids, from the name of Ptolemy I's father, Lagus

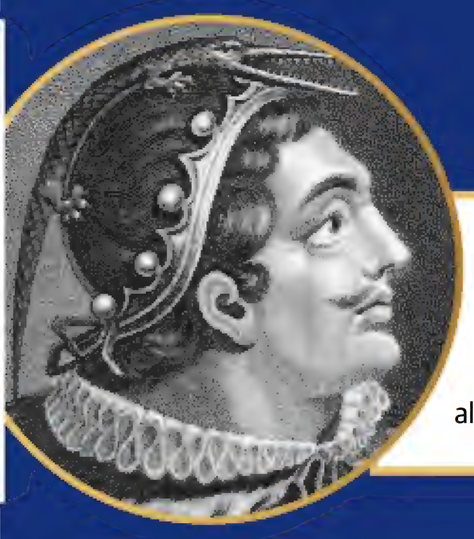
As the reign of the Ptolemaic dynasty continued, the people of Alexandria grew more and more disenfranchised with their leader. This eventually erupted into civil war during the reign of Ptolemy VIII. The war, which started in 132 BCE, raged for nearly a decade and devastated Alexandria. The threat from Rome was ever-present too, and in 96 BCE Ptolemy Apion handed valuable Egyptian territory to Rome. From this point on, the family were increasingly reliant on Rome for their power.

"Only Ptolemy I and II were natural or gifted leaders"

It was Rome that appointed Ptolemy XI and approved his successors, who were seen by the people as little more than Roman puppets.

Ultimately, it was Rome that sounded the death knell for the dynasty. Though Cleopatra VII's two-decade rule saw relations between monarch and subject restored thanks to her embracing of the culture, traditions and even language of the land she ruled, it was to be short-lived. Cleopatra took her own life in 30 BCE, and her son and co-ruler, Ptolemy XV, was put to death by Octavian Caesar as Egypt bowed to Rome. The legendary rule of the Ptolemaic dynasty, the Egyptian monarchs who had never really been Egyptian at all, was finally at an end.

The reigns of the Ptolemies

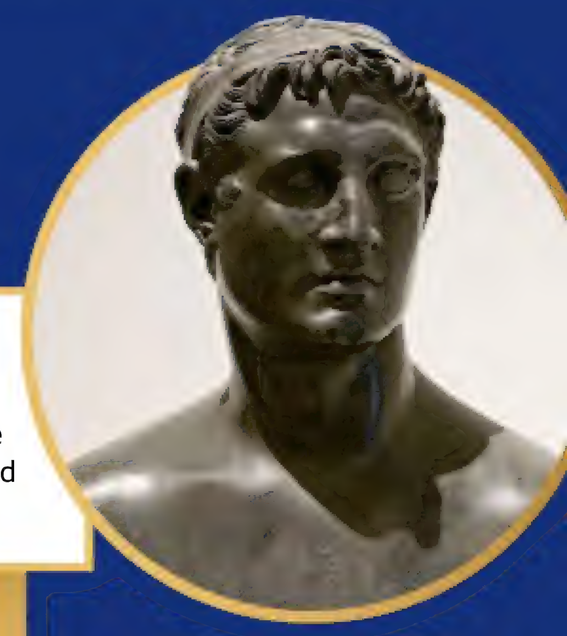


Ptolemy I

The founder of the dynasty, Ptolemy I Soter was one of Alexander the Great's most trusted allies. He was also a skilled general and politician.

Ptolemy II

Ptolemy II Philadelphus made the Alexandrian court glitter. He expanded his kingdom and embraced Alexandria's scholarly and cultural identity, including the Library of Alexandria.



Ptolemy III

Ptolemy III Euergetes is famed for publishing his decrees on carved stone blocks. He was keen to embrace Egyptian religious traditions and vastly expanded the Library.

Ptolemy IV

The reign of Ptolemy IV Philopator marked the start of the decline. He came to power after his mother's murder and was easily manipulated.

Ptolemy V

Five-year-old Ptolemy V Epiphanes' reign was hampered by ambitious regents. When his people rebelled, the adult Ptolemy V had them violently put down.

Ptolemy VI

Ptolemy VI Philometer lost his throne to his brother. He had no choice but to seek Rome's help to restore his power.

Ptolemy VII

Known as Neos Philopator, Ptolemy VII's reign was brief, if it happened at all. He was murdered by his uncle, who seized the throne.

Ptolemy VIII

Ptolemy VIII Physcon seized power through violence and cunning. He persecuted his intellectual opponents and purged them from Egypt, leading to civil war.

Ptolemy X

Ptolemy X had his mother killed so he could rule alone. When the Alexandrians rebelled, he took his revenge by melting down Alexander the Great's golden sarcophagus.

Ptolemy IX

As co-ruler with his mother, Cleopatra III, Ptolemy IX Lathyros even took a break from the throne to govern Cyprus before returning to Egypt.

Ptolemy XI

Ptolemy XI ruled for just three weeks before the people of Alexandria lynched him in revenge for killing his popular bride, who was also his stepmother!

Ptolemy XII

One of the more able rulers of the later dynasty, Ptolemy XII forged an alliance with Rome. When he was deposed, Rome returned him to power.

Ptolemy XIII

Teenaged Ptolemy XIII presided over a country riven by civil war, with his sisters challenging him for power. He drowned while attempting to flee.

Ptolemy XIV

Ptolemy XIV was married to his sister, Cleopatra. It was she who really ruled, and his fate is uncertain, though it appears Cleopatra killed him.

Ptolemy XV

Known as Caesarion, the teenage son of Cleopatra and Julius Caesar ruled alongside his mother. Following her suicide, Rome had Ptolemy XV put to death.

Cleopatra VII

Perhaps the most famous monarch of the dynasty, Cleopatra has become a romantic legend. This famed and powerful woman took her own life.

© Alamy, Getty Images, Creative Commons, Marie-Lan Nguyen

CLEOPATRA'S RUTHLESS RISE TO POWER

How the middle daughter of a despised pharaoh fought, schemed and seduced her way to becoming the most famous Egyptian ruler of all

Words by Frances White

Egypt was in turmoil. In the year 81 BCE Ptolemy IX, the pharaoh who had dared to melt down the gold coffin of Alexander the Great, was dead. A series of bloody and violent family feuds had robbed his dynasty of any legitimate male heirs, so his popular and beloved daughter, Berenice III became queen. Following the family tradition, she married her half-brother, Ptolemy XI, but just 19 days after the ceremony, the groom had his new bride murdered and claimed the throne as his own. The citizens of Alexandria were furious, and an angry mob quickly seized the new pharaoh and lynched him. This left Egypt leaderless and seemingly out of control.

As the commander of the army and the personification of god on Earth, a pharaoh's presence was essential to prevent mass unrest in Egypt and anyone, absolutely anyone, was better than no pharaoh at all. So the throne was offered to the illegitimate sons of Ptolemy IX, and Ptolemy XII stepped forward to claim it. A notorious womanizer with a fondness for drink and excess, he was hardly the shining beacon the struggling country needed to guide it through the darkness of the pit it had fallen into. A nickname for the illegitimate pharaoh quickly became popular – Nothos, or 'the bastard.' Ptolemy XII had at least five legitimate children, and Cleopatra VII was the second oldest after her sister, Berenice IV.

> Cleopatra was highly educated and is rumoured to have been able to speak as many as a dozen different languages

The young princess was clever and quick-witted, with an eager and curious mind driven by a near-insatiable thirst for knowledge. She easily excelled at her studies and even her esteemed scholars were amazed by her aptitude for languages, readily conversing with any foreign visitors whether they were Ethiopians, Hebrews, Troglodytes, Arabs, Syrians, Medes or Parthians. While she surrounded herself with the wonders of the academic world in the riches and luxury of the royal residence, outside her palace the real one was being stretched at the seams, in danger of being ripped apart.

Pharaoh Ptolemy XII was in a troublesome position. His father had promised Egypt to Rome, a promise the Roman Senate had chosen not to act on – not yet, at least. Still, Ptolemy XII was smart enough to understand that to keep the Romans happy was to ensure Egypt's survival. He sent masses of money and bribes to Julius Caesar (at that time one of Rome's most important figures), which secured the Romans' support, but damned him in the eyes of his tax-burdened citizens. In 58 BCE he was forced into exile, taking his talented younger daughter with him. When he finally returned three years later, with the backing of a Roman army courtesy of the statesman Aulus Gabinius, he discovered his oldest daughter Berenice sitting on the throne. Displaying the brutal and uncompromising ferocity that ran through his entire family, he had his daughter summarily executed. He then proceeded to reclaim the throne,

"The young princess was clever and quick-witted with a curious mind"

from which he ruled until his death in 51 BCE. The crown and all the debts he had amassed became the property of his oldest surviving daughter, Cleopatra.

The 18-year-old was not – as some expected – a naïve, wide-eyed child torn from her books to rule a kingdom on the brink of war. She had served as consort to her father for the final few years of his reign and all her education since birth had been designed to mould her into a capable queen. Queen, that was; not king, not pharaoh. Cleopatra was cursed by the requirement of all Egyptian queens to serve alongside a dominant male co-ruler and so found herself burdened with the task of being a subordinate co-regent to her ten-year-old brother, Ptolemy XIII.

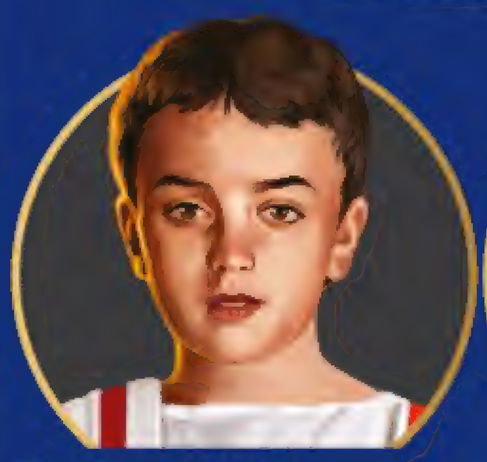
> She had four children by two fathers – Caesar and Mark Antony – but only one, Cleopatra Selene, made it to adulthood

Faced with a regency council full of ambitious men who ruled in her brother's stead and led by her own ruthless, impatient and intelligent nature, Cleopatra pushed her brother-husband into the background and established herself as sole monarch of the country.

This was dangerous; the Alexandrian courtiers swarmed over the young, impressionable king, filling his head with whispers of sole rule and the dangers of his older sister. If Cleopatra had been more patient and attentive, she could perhaps have trained a capable and obedient co-ruler in him, one who would have aided her rule, instead of bringing it crashing down. But that was simply not the Ptolemy way, and she was a Ptolemy in every sense of the word – daring, ambitious and deadly. She dropped her brother's image from coins and erased his name from official documents. With her skill, drive and cunning she was perfect for rule; in her mind she deserved Egypt and wasn't prepared to share it.

The early years of her reign would be testing, as not only was the country still struggling under the father's

A husband & two lovers



Ptolemy XIII Theos Philopator

Macedonian, 62-47 BCE

How did they get together?

The marriage between Ptolemy and his sister was arranged, as was the tradition with Egyptian royalty.

Was it true love?

Considering their joint rule erupted into a brutal civil war, we can assume there was little love lost between the siblings. There is no evidence they consummated their marriage.

How did it end?

Ptolemy was forced to flee Alexandria when the forces of Caesar and his sister-wife Cleopatra claimed victory. He reportedly drowned attempting to cross the Nile when fleeing.

Julius Caesar

Roman, 100-44 BCE

How did they get together?

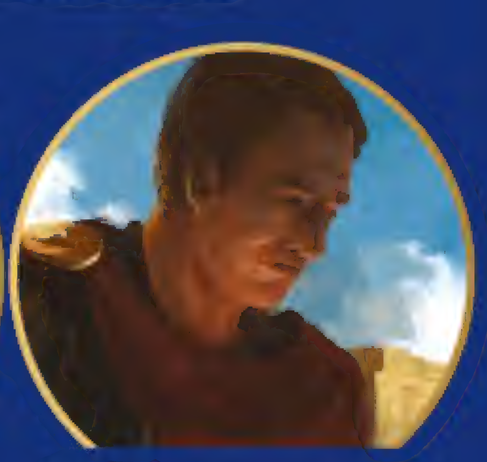
Cleopatra and her brother both needed Caesar's support. Cleopatra met with Caesar before their scheduled meeting and managed to sway his vote. Her methods can be left to the imagination.

Was it true love?

Although the union was initially spawned from mutual political gain and the two were forbidden by Roman law to marry, Cleopatra seemed to stay loyal to Caesar and had his child.

How did it end?

This love affair was cut short when Caesar was assassinated on the Ides of March.



Mark Antony

Roman, 83-30 BCE

How did they get together?

Antony summoned Cleopatra to see if she would hold true in her promised support during the war against the Parthians. She reportedly charmed him during this meeting, perhaps much the same way she had Caesar.

Was it true love?

Although it may have been borne out of political agendas, the two had three children together, and Antony risked everything to be with his Egyptian queen.

How did it end?

After the ill-fated Battle of Actium, Antony committed suicide upon mistakenly hearing Cleopatra was dead, and she quickly followed suit.

debts, but years of infrequent floods of the Nile had led to widespread famine. Over her shoulder Cleopatra could feel the ever-looming and rapidly expanding threat of Rome, and with a weak Egyptian army, her fertile land was ripe for the picking. As hungry peasants flooded into the cities, Cleopatra's popularity plummeted, and her repeated decisions that seemed designed to please Rome at Egypt's expense reminded the bitter population of her despised father.

In the middle of this political turmoil, Cleopatra found herself facing a familiar rival. Her brother was back and, aided by his many guardians and regents, was now a vicious and ruthless king who was not afraid to wipe her from the land and from history. He completely erased his sister's name from all official documents and backdated his monarchy, claiming sole rule since his father's death. With her popularity and reputation already in tatters, the disgraced queen fled the city of her birth before an angry mob could storm the palace and inflict upon her the same grisly fate as so many of her greedy and ill-fated predecessors.

Cleopatra did not abandon her ambitions, but set about building the army she would need to reclaim her throne

Having lost not only the support of her people but also the land she so strongly believed was hers to rule, Cleopatra escaped to Syria with a small band of loyal supporters. Fuelled by outrage at her brother, and even more so at the advisors who had crafted him into a vicious enemy, Cleopatra did not abandon her ambitions, but set about building the army she would need to reclaim her throne. As the female pharaoh amassed her forces in Syria, her young brother, barely 13 years old, became distracted by the ever-pressing Roman civil war. After a humiliating defeat to Caesar in Pharsalus, the Roman military leader Pompey the Great fled to the one place he was assured he could find refuge; his old ally, Egypt.

With his wife and children watching nervously from afar, Pompey disembarked his grand ship to board a small fishing boat to the shore. The Egyptian boy pharaoh, Ptolemy, sat on the shore in a throne fashioned specifically for the occasion. He watched Pompey closely, his face guarded and unreadable, but the men around him threw their arms open and, with wide smiles, cried, "Hail, commander!" It was not until the ship reached the shore that Pompey realised the murderous web in which he was entangled. Before he could cry out he was ran through with a sword and stabbed over and over again in the back. While the once-great consul was decapitated and his mutilated corpse thrown into the sea, Ptolemy did not rise from his throne. The ceremony had been a ruse; a rival of Caesar's was more valuable dead than alive.

When Caesar arrived in the harbour of Alexandria four days later, he was presented with the head of his rival. However, in mere moments Ptolemy's advisors realised their mistake, for the Roman general was completely and utterly appalled. He wept loudly and openly before leading his forces to the royal palace in Alexandria. As he observed the local resentment and civil war threatening to break the land in two he made a decision; he needed the wealth that Alexandrian taxes would give him, and the only way of increasing taxes was to establish stability in the city. The sibling rivalry had to end. He summoned Cleopatra and Ptolemy to appear before him. This was easy for Ptolemy who swiftly journeyed to Alexandria, but Cleopatra would have

Five myths unravelled

She was smuggled in a rug

The image of a dishevelled and flushed Cleopatra being unrolled from a Persian rug at Caesar's feet after being smuggled into the palace comes from the overzealous pen of Greek biographer Plutarch, but it's difficult to prove this happened. It seems unlikely that Caesar, one of the most powerful men in the world, would have welcomed a suspicious package into his room and even if so, there's no reason for her not to have emerged earlier and made a more elegant entrance.

She was a femme fatale

The idea that Cleopatra flittered between powerful men, wooing and manipulating with no idea of who fathered her children, is the result of an ancient smear campaign run against her by Roman officials. In fact, there's only evidence of her having been with two men: Julius Caesar and Mark Antony.

She was Egyptian

One of the most famous Egyptian pharaohs of all time wasn't Egyptian at all – she was Greek. Her family line is that of Ptolemy, one of the generals of Alexander the Great, and despite her family living in Egypt for over 300 years, she would have been regarded as Greek. Cleopatra was actually rare in that she could speak Egyptian, unlike many of her predecessors.

She wore a fake beard

The concept of female Egyptian queens sporting fake beards comes from the Egyptian belief that the god Osiris had a grand beard, prompting Egyptian pharaohs to do the same to establish themselves as divine beings. But by the time of Cleopatra this tradition had all but died out, and there's no record of her donning a fake beard. In fact, the only female pharaoh known to have worn one is Hatshepsut.

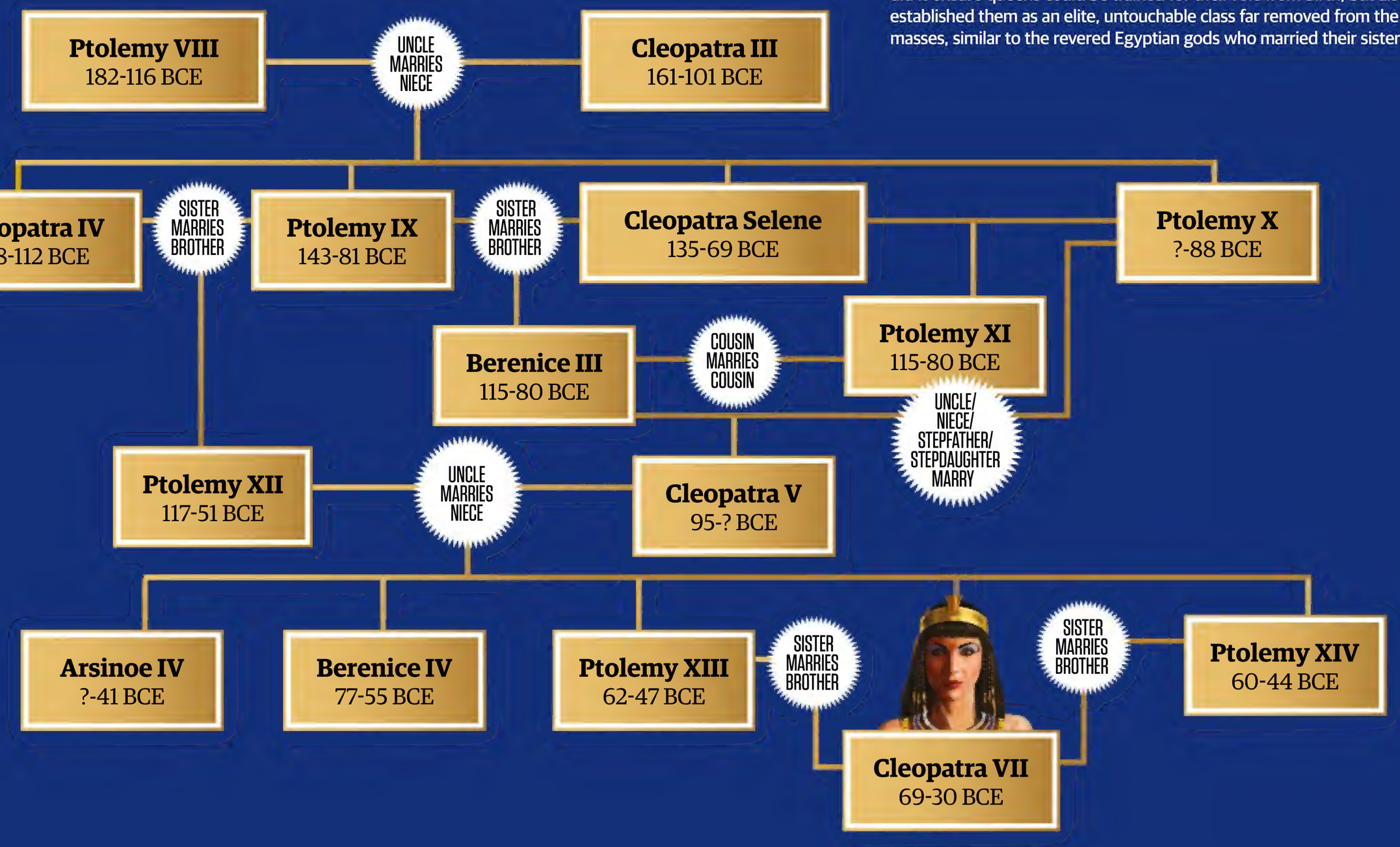
She died from an asp bite

This myth has gained momentum due to paintings of Cleopatra holding a snake to her bosom as she passes away. However, the accounts of this event are in some doubt, mainly because an asp will not cause a quick death as Cleopatra's was reported to be. It is more likely she drank a combination of poisons. The idea that the asp bit her breast is certainly incorrect, as all ancient sources state it bit her on the arm.

All in the family

Follow Cleopatra's family tree and discover just how close-knit the Ptolemies really were...

The Ptolemies of Egypt could trace their ancestry to Ptolemy I Soter, a Greek general of Alexander the Great who became ruler of Egypt in 323 BCE. After Alexander's death, his most senior generals divided his vast territory between themselves. Completely oblivious to the dangers of interbreeding, it became customary for the Ptolemies to marry their brothers and sisters. It was convenient for them as not only did it ensure queens could be trained for their role from birth, but also established them as an elite, untouchable class far removed from the masses, similar to the revered Egyptian gods who married their sisters.



to use all her cunning just to make it into the city alive.

With the harbour blocked by her brother's ships, she slipped away from her troops and travelled in a small boat along the coast in the dead of night. Her journey had been completely and utterly unfitting for a pharaoh of Egypt, a Ptolemy queen; but victory demanded sacrifice and she was confident the streets and waters she was being smuggled down would soon be hers again. It had been a challenge to make it into the palace district, but the real night's work was about to begin – she was about to go face to face with arguably the most powerful man in the known world.

Cleopatra's image on a silver coin showed her to have a hooked nose

Her brother would bend over backwards, slay Caesar's enemies and kiss his feet for his support, but he was quick to panic, eager to please and terrified of angering Rome. Her brother was a fool. Caesar needed Egypt as much as Egypt needed Rome and she would use that fact to her advantage. She would not wait to bow and plead her case alongside a child, she was going to speak to the Roman general that night.

She sneaked into the palace and managed to find her way into Caesar's private chamber.

The 'dictator in perpetuity', as he would come to be known in Rome, towered over the small woman; she would have to crane her head to look him in the eye, she realised instantly. He was far older than the young, bold Egyptian queen and his receding hairline was poorly disguised. The general was past his physical prime, but he had just won his greatest victory. This was her first time gazing upon the Roman celebrity known the world over, but this was also the first time he was facing her. Her brother was a child, a mere puppet pharaoh on strings, dancing to the pulls of his corrupt advisors, but she had been granted all the charm, intelligence and ambition of her forefathers. She would steal Caesar and Rome's support while her brother slept; her charisma would succeed where her brother's sword had failed.

The young Ptolemy XIII awoke the next day, not expecting his dangerous older sister to have even made it to the palace. When he discovered that not only was she there, but had also seduced Caesar overnight into joining her cause, it was the final straw. Screaming in desperation, he fled from the palace, tore his crown from his head and fell to his knees. His sister had done it again. She was

Cleopatra was as much an intellectual and scholar as a passionate fighter

completely and utterly impossible to get rid of and, even as the crowd surged forward in protest, Caesar could not be swayed. The siblings would rule Egypt together, just as their father had intended. Rome had spoken.

The apparent peace did not last long. Already poisoned by the ambitious whispers that had fed his youth, Ptolemy joined with his rebellious sister Arsinoe IV. Between them they amassed an army large enough to challenge Cleopatra and Caesar's forces in Egypt. The country they fought for would pay the price, and in December of 48 BCE the famous stone city of Alexandria was set alight, destroying not only the lives of hundreds of citizens, but also the world-famous library that housed countless priceless manuscripts. When Caesar's reinforcements poured into the city from Pergamum, Ptolemy's forces were finally defeated. The young and impetuous king tried to flee across the Nile in an overcrowded boat, but his vessel sank, dragging him and his elaborate, heavy golden armour down with it.

One Ptolemy was dead, but another still lived. Ptolemy XIV, Cleopatra's 13-year-old brother, became her husband and co-ruler immediately after her brother's death. She might have had Caesar's support, but tradition was tradition and a lone woman could not rule Egypt. Caesar had put in place a reliable partnership and Egypt was, for all intents and purposes, a Roman territory. In a lavish display of the new union, a fleet of Roman and Egyptian ships sailed down the Nile accompanied by the grand royal barge where Cleopatra and Caesar sat together.

Egypt and Rome were united, but Cleopatra still found herself co-ruler to another Ptolemy who would inevitably grow up to be ambitious and treacherous. She could not allow another brother to be swayed by advisors and driven against her. As long as Ptolemy XIV lived, her rule was threatened. She knew Egypt would never accept a solitary female queen, but there was a technicality that would ensure her effective sole rule. Her partnership with Caesar had provided more than his political support; she was pregnant and gave birth in 47 BCE. The gods' will was in her favour: the child was a boy. She named him Caesarion, or 'Little Caesar', and now had an heir. For three years Cleopatra tightened her grip on the Egyptian throne, slowly winning the love of the Alexandrian mobs that had previously screamed for her head. She travelled to Rome with her son and resided in Caesar's country house as rumours about the paternity of her son gained speed. She did little to squash them; a possible heir of Caesar was a powerful tool to have.

When Caesar was assassinated on 15 March 44 BCE, Cleopatra left Rome and returned to Alexandria. If there was ever a time to act, it was now. Without her powerful lover by her side she needed an ally who could assure her rule, one who wasn't going to lead a rebellion against her. Brothers, she'd learned, could not be trusted. Later that year, the youngest Ptolemy was found dead, seemingly poisoned. The people's grief was muted; the death of Ptolemies, however young, was not so uncommon in Egypt, and the people had a new pharaoh to replace him: the young Caesarion. Cleopatra had finally done it, she was Egypt's pharaoh, and with her son an infant she was ruling alone in all but name. The power of Egypt was hers.

She penned *Cosmetics*, a book of pharmaceutical treatments for such ailments as hair loss and dandruff

End of an era

Cleopatra's surviving children were adopted by Octavia, sister of Augustus. They became Roman citizens and faded quickly into obscurity. Egypt, now a Roman province, was ruled by a prefect. Greek remained the official language. While Alexandria continued to flourish, it became a site of many religious and military uprisings.

In 269 CE, Alexandria was claimed by yet another woman, when Zenobia, the ferocious warrior queen of Palmyra, conquered Egypt. Zenobia, who was an admirer of Cleopatra, was quick to behead her detested Roman foes. She ruled Egypt until 274, before she herself was taken hostage by the Roman Emperor Aurelian. In an ironic twist of fate, Zenobia appeared in golden chains during Aurelian's Triumph in Rome.

The legacy of Greco-Roman Egypt still survives. It can be seen in a series of magnificent temples that were built along the River Nile. These include the Temple of Hathor at Dendera, where fabulous images of Cleopatra and Caesarion still dominate the walls therein.

The delicate amalgamation of the Egyptian and Roman cultures can also be seen on many mummy portrait panels from the Greco-Roman period. Contrasts are visible in paintings and sculptures where traditional Egyptian iconography is paired with Roman symbolism. The result – a hybrid blend of the ancient and even more ancient – is now all that remains of the former bond between Rome and Egypt, Antony and Cleopatra.

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LEGACY

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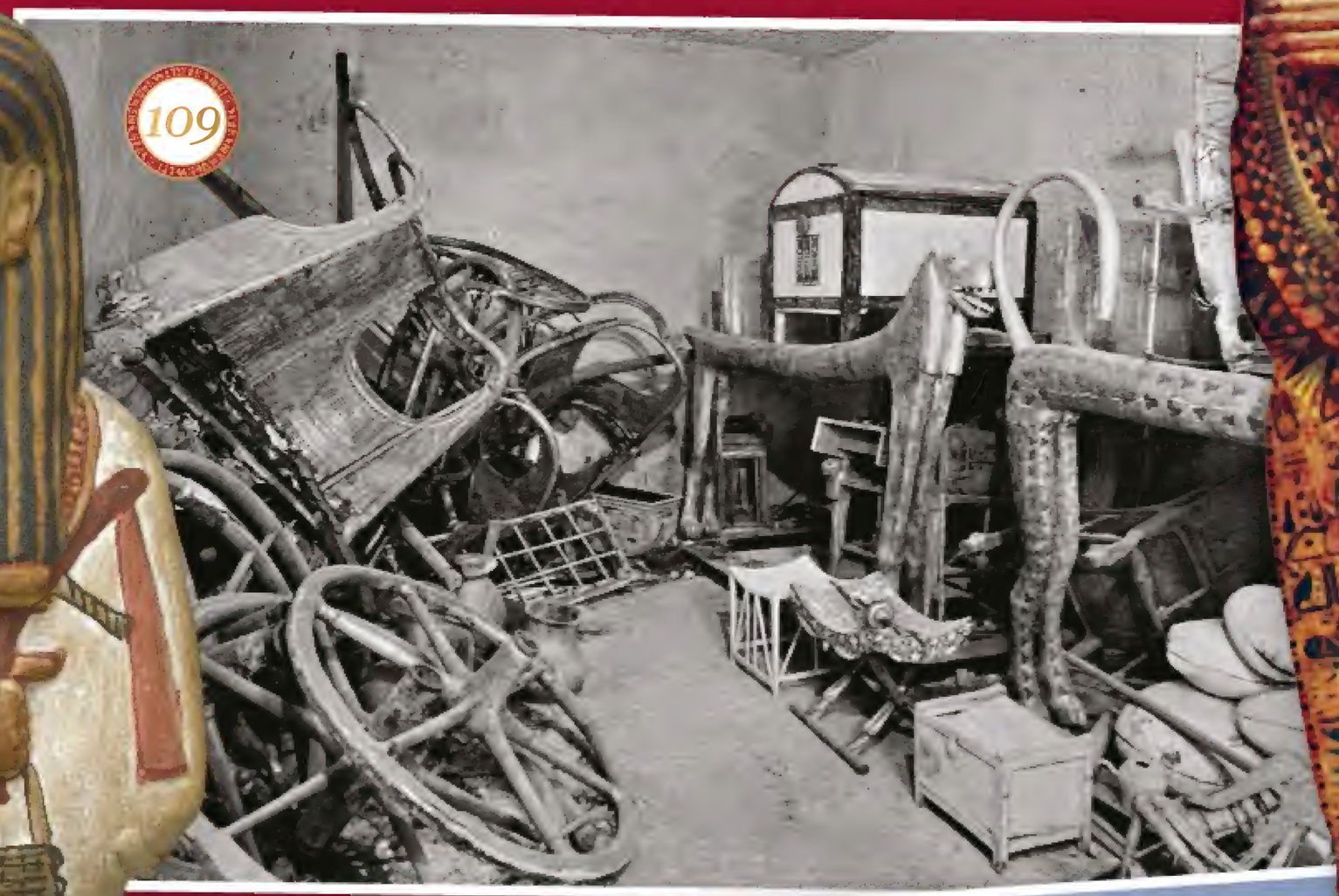

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The Ancient Egyptians worshipped more than 1,400 gods and goddesses

DEATH, BURIAL & THE AFTERLIFE

It was home to a thriving civilisation, but it was in the land beyond the grave that the Egyptians believed they truly came to life

Words by Alicea Francis

Beneath the burning hot sands of the Eastern Desert lie the remains of one of the greatest civilisations the world has ever seen. The Ancient Egyptians flourished along the banks of the River Nile between the third and first millennia BCE, with an empire that stretched as far north as modern-day Syria and as far south as Nubia in northern Sudan.

These people led rich lives. The fertile soil gave rise to a thriving agricultural society that developed some of the most advanced farming techniques of the ancient world. Their building projects were unparalleled, and they forever altered the Egyptian skyline with their towering temples and imposing pyramids. Their armies were undefeated, their science was revolutionary, and their art provided a blueprint for the Renaissance masters.

But it was in death that the Egyptians believed they truly lived. Their faith in the afterlife was unshakeable, but entry was not guaranteed. The spirit of the dead would first have to navigate through a perilous underworld, battling gods, monsters and gatekeepers until it reached the Hall of Judgement. Here, it would be brought before 42 divine judges, to whom it would have to prove its worthiness for the afterlife. If successful, the spirit could then proceed to the Weighing of the Heart ceremony. Its heart, which contained a record of all its good and bad deeds, was weighed against the feather of the goddess Ma'at. If the heart was heavier, it was thrown to the crocodile-headed demoness Ammut and the soul was cast into the darkness. If the scales balanced, the soul could pass on to the Field of Rushes – a heavenly reflection of life on Earth.

With so much to compete with in death, the Ancient Egyptians spent their lives preparing for it. As well as trying to avoid sin, funerary items were purchased, coffins were commissioned and tombs were built, many of which were more elaborate than their earthly homes.

But it's the preparation of the body itself after death that continues to capture the imagination; it is at the centre of our enduring fascination with death in Ancient Egypt.

Mummification

The gory embalmment process was able to produce mummies that would last for eternity

Eternal life wasn't just about preserving the spirit. The deceased's body also had to preserved, as the Ancient Egyptians believed the soul (*ba*) and life force (*ka*) had to return to it regularly to survive. To prevent the body decaying, it underwent a lengthy and gruesome mummification process. Developed and refined over millennia, it allowed Ancient Egypt to produce some of the best-preserved mummies in the world, and we can now gaze upon the faces of men, women and children almost exactly as they were more than 2,000 years ago.

The first mummies in Egypt date back to approximately 3500 BCE. Before that time, all citizens regardless of social status were buried in desert graves, which allowed natural preservation to occur through dehydration. An artificial method known as embalmment was then developed that would ensure even better preservation and allow bodies to be kept within tombs. The most complicated mummification process was developed in about 1550 BCE, and is considered the best method of preservation. With this method, the internal organs were removed, the flesh dehydrated, and then the body was wrapped in linen strips. This was an expensive process that took about 70 days to complete, so only the very rich could afford it. Working class people were treated with an alternative method of preservation that involved liquidising the internal organs with cedar tree oil, draining them out through the rectum and then placing the body in a salty substance called natron to dehydrate it.

Embalming took place in the Red Land, a desert region away from the heavily populated areas and with easy access to the Nile. Upon death, the body would be carried to the Ibu, or the 'Place of Purification', where it would be washed in river water. It was then taken to the *per nefer*, or 'house of mummification', which was an open tent to allow for ventilation. Here it was laid out on a table ready to be dissected by the embalmers. These men were skilled artisans who had a deep knowledge of anatomy and a steady hand. They were also often priests, as performing religious rites over the deceased was an equally important part of the embalming process. The most experienced priest carried out the major parts of mummification, like the wrapping of the body, and wore a jackal mask as he did so. This symbolised the presence of Anubis – god of embalming and the afterlife – during the mummification.

01 *Purify the body*
Before the embalming process can begin, the body is washed in water from the Nile and palm wine.

02 *Remove the internal organs*
A small incision is made in the left side of the body and the liver, lungs, intestines and stomach are removed. They are then washed and packed in natron before being placed in canopic jars. The heart is left in the body as it is believed to be the centre of intelligence, and will be needed in the afterlife.

03 *Discard the brain*
A rod is inserted through the nostril into the skull and used to break apart the brain so that it can drain out of the nose. The liquid is then thrown away as it is not thought to be useful.

04 *Leave to dry*
The body is stuffed and covered with natron, a type of salt, which will absorb any moisture. It is then left for 40 days to dry out.

05 *Stuff the body*
Once again, it is washed in water from the Nile and covered with oils to help the skin stay elastic. The natron is scooped out and the body is then stuffed with sawdust and linen to make it look lifelike.

When a pet cat died, the household would shave off their eyebrows to signify their loss

The Egyptian embalmer's guide to amulets

These charms were placed between the mummy's layers of linen, but what did each one do?

The Heart
This protected the heart, believed to be the most important organ. The underside was often inscribed with spells from the Book of the Dead that would help the spirit navigate the underworld.

The Knot of Isis
Knots were regularly used as amulets as it was believed they bound and released magic. They were said to protect the wearer from harm, and were placed on the neck.

The Djed
This represented the backbone of Osiris, the god of the afterlife. It was wrapped close to the spine and enabled the mummy to sit up in the afterlife, ensuring its resurrection.

The Headrest
According to the Book of the Dead, if placed under the neck, this amulet provided physical comfort for the deceased and also prevented them from being decapitated.

The Collar
This was placed on the mummy's neck and allowed it to free itself of its bandages in the afterlife.

The Papyrus Sceptre
The papyrus plant represented new life and resurrection. It was believed to give the dead the energy and vitality to survive the terrifying ordeals of the underworld.

The Two Fingers
Placed near to the incision through which the organs were removed, these may have been intended to 'hold' the incision sealed and prevent evil spirits from entering the body.

The Serpent
This was placed anywhere on the body and prevented the spirit from being bitten by snakes in the underworld.

The Frog
This was believed to contain the powers of Heqet, the frog-headed goddess of life and fertility. When placed on the mummy, it would allow it to be brought back to life.

01

05

06

02

08 Say a prayer
A priest reads spells out loud while the body is being wrapped in order to ward off evil spirits. He will often wear a mask of Anubis – the god associated with the embalming process and the afterlife.

07 Add amulets
Charms called amulets are placed in between the layers to protect the body during its journey to the afterlife.

06 Wrap in linen
First, the head and neck are wrapped in strips of linen, then the fingers and toes. The arms and legs are wrapped separately before being tied together. Liquid resin is used as glue.

Animal mummies

The Ancient Egyptians believed that many of their gods and goddesses could live on Earth in animal form. The god Amun could take the form of a goose or ram, the god Thoth could be an ibis or baboon, and the goddess Bastet took the form of a cat. These animals were treated like deities, and when they died, they were mummified just like humans. In the Late Period (661-332 BCE), animal mummies were produced commercially and sold for use as offerings. X-rays reveal that the animals were clearly bred for the purpose and some were deliberately killed. Many of the mummies that survive today contain only tiny fragments of bone, or are entirely empty, suggesting that demand for these sacred items must have outstripped supply.

A stone sarcophagus inside a tomb in the Valley of the Kings

Burial

The Ancient Egyptians' resting place could be nothing short of what they experienced in life

Long before their deaths, wealthy Egyptians built luxurious tombs for themselves and filled them with objects that would protect and assist them in the afterlife. This ranged from simple items like bowls, combs and clothing to chariots, furniture, weapons and jewellery. The treasures found in Ancient Egyptian tombs are among some of the most valuable in the world, and show that status symbols were considered just as important for the afterlife as they had been on Earth. Food was also stored in the tomb and left as offerings after the tomb had been sealed in order to sustain the life force (*ka*) – one of the five elements that made up the human soul. Even depictions of food painted onto the walls of the tomb were believed to provide nourishment for the dead.

The day of burial was when the deceased moved from the world of the living to the world of the dead. Both poor and rich were given a ceremony of some kind, as it was considered essential in order for the spirit to pass to the afterlife. Wealthy and royal Egyptians received an elaborate funeral, during which a procession of mourners and dancers accompanied the coffin to a tomb, which was either below ground or within a *mastaba* or pyramid. Also present were two women called 'kites', whose job was to mourn overtly and inspire others to do the same. Remembrance of the dead ensured passage to the afterlife, and displays of grief were thought to help the deceased's cause in the Hall of Judgement.

Tombs contained everything needed in the afterlife, including toilets

On arrival at the burial site, a priest performed the Opening of the Mouth ceremony. The mummy was propped upright while spells were uttered and a ceremonial blade pressed against the mouth (to allow it to breathe, eat and drink), eyes (to allow it to see) and limbs (to allow it to move). Food and gifts that would assist the spirit in the afterlife were then offered and a funerary banquet was held. Finally, the coffin was carried into the tomb, where royal mummies would be placed within a stone sarcophagus. This was intended to provide an extra layer of protection against grave robbers, who were rife in the Nile valley. Spells and prayers were recited, and then the tomb sealed, never to be opened again... or so they hoped.

Mummy of a man who lived during the Ptolemaic Period

Shabti

These figurines were buried alongside the dead, and were believed to act as servants in the afterlife. They could be made of wood, clay or stone and were often quite small, although earlier life-sized models have been found. Many of them are depicted carrying hoes and baskets, as Ancient Egyptians believed that in the afterlife they would be allocated a plot of land that they would have to farm and maintain. Over 1,000 of them were found in pharaoh Taharqa's tomb alone, making them one of Ancient Egypt's most common artefacts.

Tutankhamun's tomb as it was discovered in 1922

The Sarcophagus of Nitocris

The many layers of a mummy

Mummification was not the final step in the quest for eternal life. The body would be placed in several cases and coffins – sometimes up to eight – before eventually being laid to rest

01 Objects for the afterlife

Once the body had been wrapped in layers of linen, items like jewellery and daggers were placed on the mummy for use in the afterlife. A scarab amulet was hung from the neck to help guide the soul during the Weighing of the Heart ceremony.

02 Cartonnage case

After mummification, a cartonnage case was created. This was formed around a straw and mud core, to which plaster and linen bandages soaked in resin or animal glue was applied, similar to papier mâché. Once it set, the case was split open, the stuffing removed and the body placed inside.

03 Decoration

Another cartonnage case was added and then a layer of plaster or gesso – made from resin and chalk powder – was painted over the top. Natural dyes like indigo, madder and ochre were used to create intricate designs on the cartonnage, particularly depictions of the god of the underworld, Osiris.

04 Wooden coffin

The body was placed in an anthropoid wooden coffin. Those of royalty may have been painted with gold leaf and decorated with precious jewels. A death mask made of cartonnage, wood or precious metals was placed on the head to ensure that its soul could recognise its body.

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TOMB RAIDERS

Almost every Ancient Egyptian tomb was robbed – those responsible did not always get away with it

Words by David Smith

Tomb raiding was commonplace in Ancient Egypt – very few tombs are found that have not been systematically looted. It is believed to have started in earnest, or at least to have become a problem on a large enough scale to trigger a response, in the Early Dynastic Period, starting around 3150 BCE.

The mummy of Ramesses II survived because it was moved from its original burial place

It was then that burial chambers started to be designed in order to frustrate would-be thieves. From simply filling the access tunnels with boulders, rocks and wooden beams to more sophisticated diversion attempts – though actual traps were not employed – efforts were made to protect the resting places of the royal and the rich.

The efforts were futile, however, and the daubing of curses on walls and doorways was equally ineffective. Even the most elaborate of the tombs, the pyramids at Giza, proved vulnerable. All of the pyramids had empty burial chambers when they were explored – treasure, coffins, even the mummies themselves, had all long since been removed.

Tomb raiding was a problem with no apparent solution, and there are several surprising reasons for this. The robbers are often imagined as shadowy, desperate men, holding flaming torches and risking their lives in perilous tunnels, but the reality was often far less dramatic. Tomb raiding became almost a humdrum activity in Ancient Egypt – and it was often condoned by the state itself.

As any Egyptologist will tell you, most tombs were raided within weeks of being sealed up. Some were even pillaged before burial had taken place. This was often a destructive process, with the raiders deliberately destroying anything that had no value. They were also prone to destroying the mummies – first ripping them apart in a search for precious jewellery and then setting fire to the corpses to prevent the possibility of a haunting. Curiously, although superstition was clearly a part of the Ancient Egyptians' make-up, this did not prevent them from desecrating the tombs of the mighty. Depriving a mummy of the materials it needed in the afterlife was no small act – it was literally robbing the person of any chance of an immortal existence.

> The village of Deir el-Medina is located on the west bank of the Nile, across the river from modern-day Luxor

Attempts to guard against this were stepped up in the period known as the New Kingdom of Egypt, which began around 1570 BCE. Amenhotep I had the bright idea of ordering tombs to be built out in the desert, making them harder to reach. The sites he chose became known as the Valley of the Kings and the Valley of the Queens, and he built a village, Deir el-Medina, to house the workers who built the tombs.

The theory appeared sound – the workers were dependent on the tombs for their livelihood, so they would be loyal and prevent others from robbing them. In actual fact, it was often the workers themselves who did the raiding. Knowing

King Tutankhamun's spectacular gold death mask would almost certainly have been looted if his tomb had not been accidentally buried

A tomb raider is depicted in the act of getting caught by a guard and his trained baboon

where a tomb was, how it had been built and what security measures had been incorporated into its design were vital bits of information, which the workers were obviously all too aware of.

The raiders were also not necessarily in search of fabulous wealth. A shortage of food and water for labourers during the reign of Ramesses III led to a strike, believed to be the first such strike in history, and also to a surge in tomb raiding, as men sought a way to simply feed themselves and their families. With valuable materials easily accessible in unguarded tombs, the poor and underprivileged could treat them as little more than a cash machine to be visited repeatedly when times were hard.

Shifting large quantities of gold and precious stones was also difficult, so many thefts were on a small scale. There was no system of currency at the time, so loot could only be exchanged for goods. Wood was often equally desirable, especially towards the end of the 20th Dynasty when Egypt was weak and imports of quality timber hard to come by. Ripping up the floors of tombs – this happened in the chamber of Ramesses II, although his mummy had been moved and survived intact – and pulling off doors gave robbers a useful supply of wood, which could easily be transformed into new forms. Carbon dating of some coffins has revealed great discrepancies in the ages of different sections, suggesting that some parts had been 'recycled' from earlier burials.

Such recycling was often undertaken for different reasons. Burying large quantities of the nation's wealth every time an important member of society died was economically draining, and it often made sense to reclaim some of it at a later date. In this way, the current pharaoh might sanction the raiding of much older tombs in order to furnish his own.

The regularity of raiding does not mean it was a risk-free enterprise. Detailed descriptions of the trials of robbers make it clear that punishments could be severe, ranging from a simple beating on the soles of the feet to the cutting off of a man's nose or hands, or even execution in the most serious cases.

Despite this, career criminals often took a light-hearted view of their profession, as the confession of one tomb raider makes clear. Amenpanufer, a stonemason, was caught in the act around 1110 BCE, and his testimony betrays a casual attitude to his crime: "We went to rob the tombs, as is our usual habit," he revealed, "and we found the tomb of King Sobekemsaf... we collected the gold that we found on the mummy of the god, including the amulets and jewels which were on his neck. We set fire to their coffins."

Amenpanufer appears to have been able to escape punishment by paying a bribe, claiming that he was then reimbursed by the other members of his gang. Afterward his tomb raiding continued.

> *"It was often the workers themselves who did the raiding"*

One of the most well-preserved tombs, that of Tutankhamun, makes it clear how rare it was for a chamber to go unpillaged. Although it was robbed, probably twice, in its early days, builders constructing a tomb for Ramesses VI accidentally buried Tutankhamun's tomb completely. Only this random event prevented King Tut from enduring the same fate as most of the others who had gone before him.

The ruins of Deir el-Medina, near the Valley of the Kings

The pyramids made it easy for would-be robbers to locate a tomb

© Alamy, Getty Images

LANDMARKS *of the* PHARAOHS

Demonstrating their wealth, power and advanced architectural techniques, pharaohs oversaw the construction of landmarks that still awe visitors to this day

Words by Victoria Williams

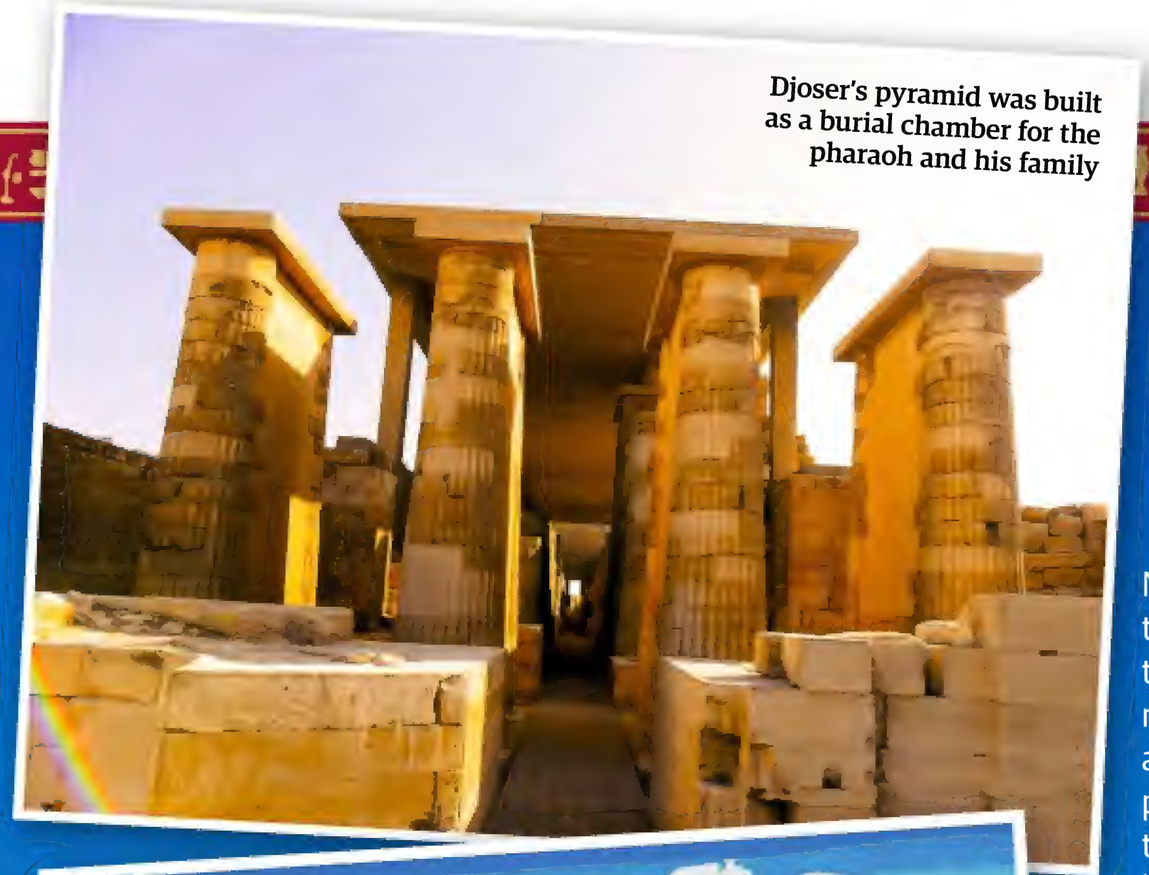
Egypt is famous for its pyramids and sphinxes, but these were not the only architectural achievements of its ancient civilisation. Using ramps and levers, slaves built palaces, monuments and tombs larger than any seen before. Ancient Egypt spanned more than 2,000 years and was ruled by about 170 pharaohs, so architecture and decoration varied hugely in style. Kings were known to take apart or alter the constructions of their predecessors to fulfil their own creative visions.

As wood was scarce, most buildings were constructed from mud brick and limestone, which were readily available in the area, although stones like granite and sandstone were also quarried, transported and used for building temples and tombs. Most architects of the time favoured the post and lintel system, holding roofs and horizontal features up with thick, often highly decorated columns.

Few mud-brick buildings survive, but it's thought that the stone temples and pyramids may have taken inspiration for their shape from these more humble structures, which relied on slightly sloped walls for stability.

Stone monuments and obelisks were developed in the Second Dynasty. Obelisks were always placed pointing to the heavens in pairs, and Egyptians believed a mirroring pair existed in the realm of the gods for each set on Earth. Usually carved from single blocks of stone, obelisks required the development of efficient methods for transporting heavy objects on the Nile and over land. Monumental buildings became more complex in the Fourth Dynasty with the introduction of the arch, which allowed for more elegant entrances and avenues.

Ancient Egyptians measured and charted celestial movements and astronomical events, and religious buildings were designed to align with equinoxes and solstices. Tombs were often built to face certain stars, as it was believed that pharaohs became celestial bodies themselves after death. Thanks to their detailed writing system, Ancient Egyptians were able to share charts, plans and instructions, so successful constructions could be replicated or used as models for new designs.



Djoser's pyramid was built as a burial chamber for the pharaoh and his family

The step pyramid was surrounded by colonnades, courts, tombs and an enclosing wall

Pyramid of Djoser

Northwest of the city of Memphis lies the Pyramid of Djoser, often referred to as the Step Pyramid. Pharaoh Djoser reigned during the Old Kingdom, ascending to the throne at some point in the 27th century BCE, and the pyramid was built for his burial by his chancellor, Imhotep. A limestone statue of the pharaoh, the oldest known life-sized statue from Ancient Egypt, used to stand at the tomb; today, it is kept at Cairo's Museum of Egyptian Antiquities. Djoser parted from established styles during the planning of his resting place, laying down the plans for the first stone monumental structure and paving the way for later pyramids.

The seven-level pyramid once stood in the central courtyard of a mortuary complex, 62.5 metres (205 feet) tall and covered in white limestone. Sometimes known as protopyramids, stepped tombs and temples have been found across the world in countries including Mexico, Sardinia and Iran. In the case of Djoser's pyramid, each level except for the roof is a mastaba – an early form of tomb with a flat roof and rectangular shape. The significance of the steps during Third Dynasty Egypt is unknown, but it's thought the shape of pyramid might have represented the pharaoh's crown or been intended to aid his ascension to the North Star after death.

The pyramid extends far beyond its visible exterior. Underneath the layered mastabas, a series of chambers, galleries and tunnels run for a combined length of almost six kilometres (3.7 miles) from a central shaft 28 metres (92 feet) deep. This underground space was used for the burial of the pharaoh and his family, and storage of offerings to the gods. Djoser's body has never been found; the pyramid was raided by tomb robbers and few of the items once kept in the tomb have been recovered.

This pyramid is believed to be the oldest colossal stone building in Egypt

Karnak

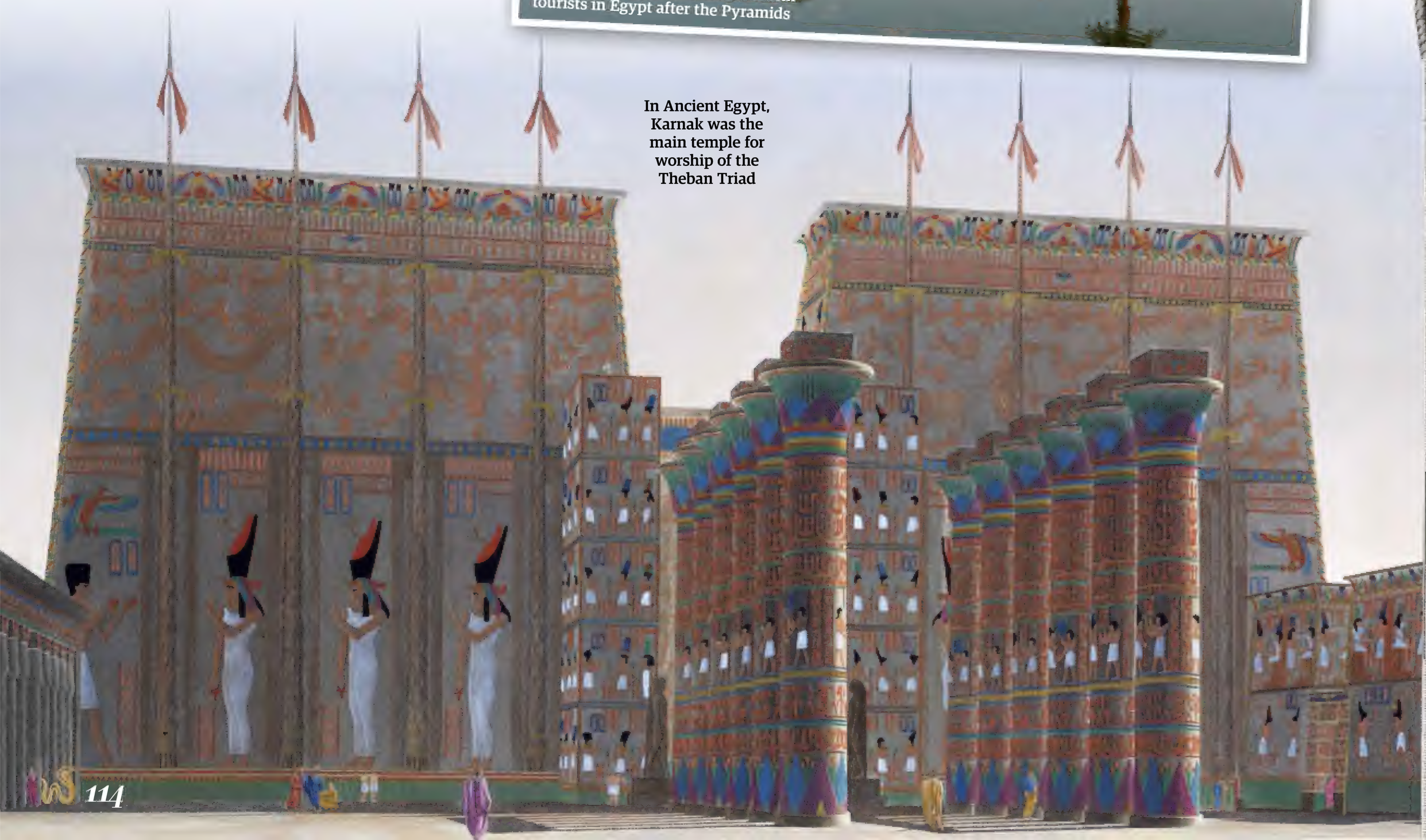
The temple complex at Karnak – known to the Ancient Egyptians as Ipet-isu, or 'most select of places' – once covered an area near Luxor measuring about 0.8 square kilometres (0.3 square miles). Most of the buildings remaining today were constructed during the New Kingdom when Thebes became the capital of Egypt, but construction began during the reign of Middle Kingdom pharaoh Senusret I (1971-26 BCE) and continued for almost 2,000 years. Around 30 pharaohs added to the site, producing a diversity of architectural styles seen nowhere else.

It wasn't just the site that was vast; covering 5,000 square metres (54,000 square feet) and supported by 134 stone columns, the Great Hypostyle Hall is thought to be the largest room in any religious building in the world. 122 of the columns stand ten metres (33 feet) tall, while the other 12 loom at nearly 24 metres (79 feet). The giant complex accommodated the thousands of people worshipping the Theban Triad: Amun, Mut and Khonsu. Each god had its own precinct, as for a time did the pharaoh Amenhotep IV. To honour the head of the triad, the Precinct of Amun-Re was the largest, complete with giant statues and a sacred lake.

Throughout its long history, the layout of the complex was altered as parts were added, removed, changed and repurposed. Among the remains, visitors can still see chapels, temples, columns, obelisks and statues, many of which are familiar thanks to the appearance of the site in multiple video games and films. Only the Precinct of Amun-Re, however, is accessible to the public as part of the Karnak Open Air Museum.

Carved archway into the Temple of Amun at Karnak

Karnak is the most popular site with tourists in Egypt after the Pyramids



In Ancient Egypt, Karnak was the main temple for worship of the Theban Triad

Hatshepsut's temple sits close to the temple of Mentuhotep II, and was modelled on this earlier building

Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut

The mortuary temple has undergone extensive restoration to return it to its former glory

Hatshepsut's temple, situated at Deir el-Bahari, to the west of the Nile, is considered by many people to be among the most beautiful of all the Ancient Egyptian mortuary temples. While it may appear bare today, matching the stark cliff and mountains that lie behind it, when it was new its colonnaded terraces played host to gardens that were packed to the brim with rare, exotic plants and its long ramps were constantly in use by both subjects and worshippers.

The temple was built to align with the winter solstice, enabling sunlight to fall on the chapel wall and the Osiris statues standing on either side of the inner chamber door. Light-boxes cast additional beams of light onto statues of the gods Amun and Hapi and into the innermost chapel.

Queen Hatshepsut is the second confirmed female pharaoh of Ancient Egypt, and sculptures inside the temple told the story of her divine birth. A sphinx avenue, the two statues of Osiris and many likenesses of the queen also decorated the building, but most were destroyed on the orders of her stepson, Thutmose III, or stolen by tomb raiders.

Today, the Colossi are all that remain of the temple complex

When they were first carved, the statues were imposing likenesses of Amenhotep III

The Colossi of Memnon

Standing 18 metres (59 feet) tall, the Colossi of Memnon are an impressive sight in the Theban Necropolis. They were built in 1350 BCE, in the likeness of 18th Dynasty pharaoh Amenhotep III, and the giant twin statues sit gazing east towards the Nile. Carved into the front of the throne are two smaller figures – the pharaoh's mother and his wife.

Blocks of quartzite sandstone for the statues were transported almost 700 kilometres (435 miles) over land from the quarry site as they were probably too heavy to be moved on the Nile. The Colossi were erected to guard the pharaoh's mortuary temple, where Egyptians could worship Amenhotep as a god both during his reign and after his death.

At the time of its construction, the temple complex was the largest and grandest in all of Egypt, sprawling over 0.348 square kilometres (0.134 square miles). Today, the Colossi are almost all that remains of the vast complex. An earthquake dated to around 1200 BCE destroyed the buildings, and a second in 27 BCE left the statues in need of reconstruction. The Nile's annual floods wore at what was left of the foundations, and it's likely that pharaohs following Amenhotep repurposed materials from the temple for their own projects.

The Ramesseum

The longest reigning of all the pharaohs, Ramesses II used his 67 years on the throne to build more temples than any other Ancient Egyptian ruler. His greatest undertaking was his mortuary temple, the Ramesseum, a building in the Theban Necropolis that took 20 years to complete. The temple was given its modern name in 1829, when French scholar Jean-François Champollion first deciphered hieroglyphics on the walls referring to the pharaoh.

As was tradition in a mortuary temple, two giant statues of Ramesses watched over the building, and scenes of his greatest victories, his children and his lifelong dedication to the gods were carved into the walls and pylons. Here worshippers could pay respect to Ramesses as a god on Earth. Smaller temples, including one dedicated to his mother and his chief wife and one built in his father Seti I's memory, stood around the main memorial building along with bakeries, kitchens and store rooms, and mud walls enclosed the whole complex.

Built at the edge of the Nile floodplain, much of the Ramesseum has been undermined and washed away. With the help of a hydraulic engine invented by Italian engineer Giovanni Belzoni, the granite head of one of the statues was removed and transported to England in 1818; today it can be found at the British Museum.

Now missing their heads, Osiride statues once depicted the pharaoh in the form of Osiris, god of the underworld

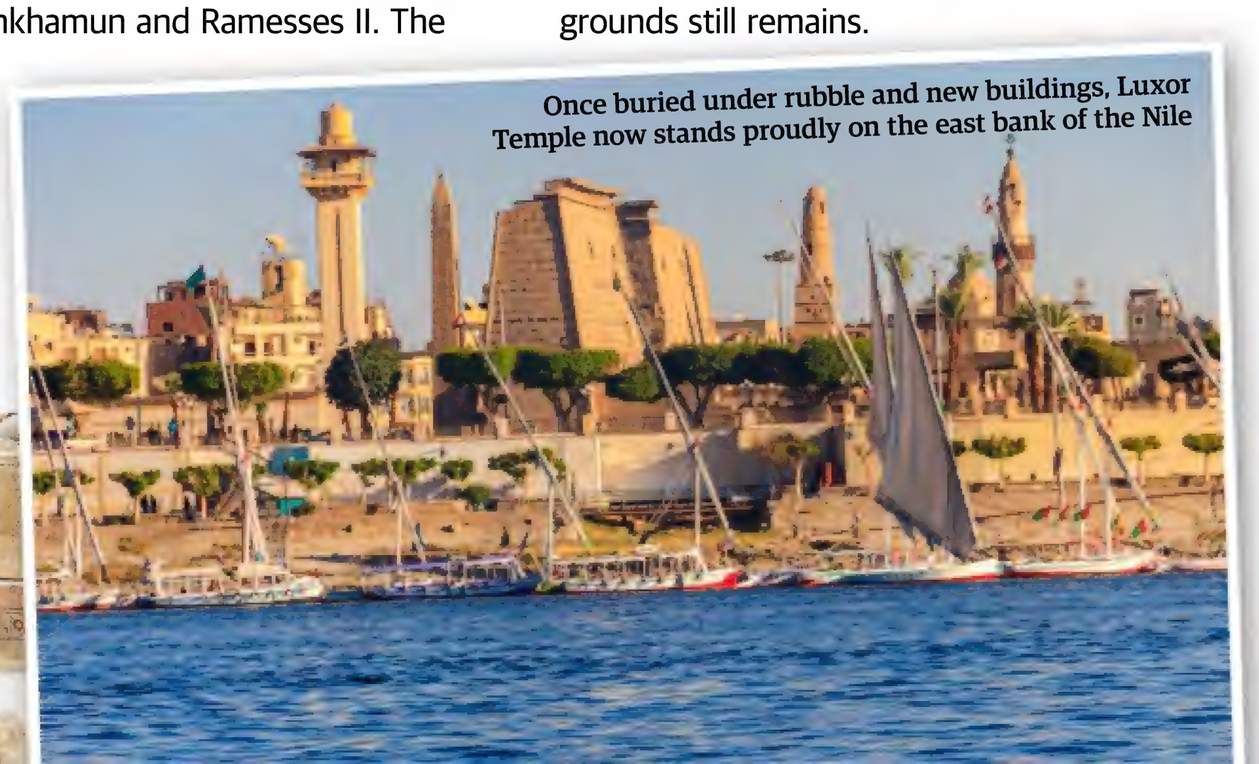
Two pylons used to flank the entrance of Luxor Temple - today one can be found in Paris

Luxor Temple

Not far from Karnak stands the Luxor Temple; the location of these two great monuments and other sites of interest within Luxor (once known as Thebes) gave rise to the city's nickname, 'the world's greatest open-air museum'. Luxor Temple was dedicated to the Theban Triad, and it's thought it may have been the site of the crowning of new kings.

The temple is made from Nubian sandstone quarried from a site around 150 kilometres (93 miles) along the Nile from Luxor. Sun courts, pylons, obelisks, statues and chapels were constructed first by Amenhotep III and later by Tutankhamun and Ramesses II. The temple was the finishing point of Thebes' annual Opet Festival, a celebration involving the procession of statues of the Theban Triad from Karnak through the sphinx-lined avenue connecting the sites, and the ceremonial re-coronation of the pharaoh.

During Medieval times, settlers in Luxor built on and around the temple, creating a huge hill of rubble on top of three-quarters of the site. Excavation began in 1884, led by French Egyptologist Professor Gaston Maspero, and continued well into the 20th century. Several buildings, including towers, huts and barracks, were removed to expose the temple, but a mosque built within its grounds still remains.



Once buried under rubble and new buildings, Luxor Temple now stands proudly on the east bank of the Nile

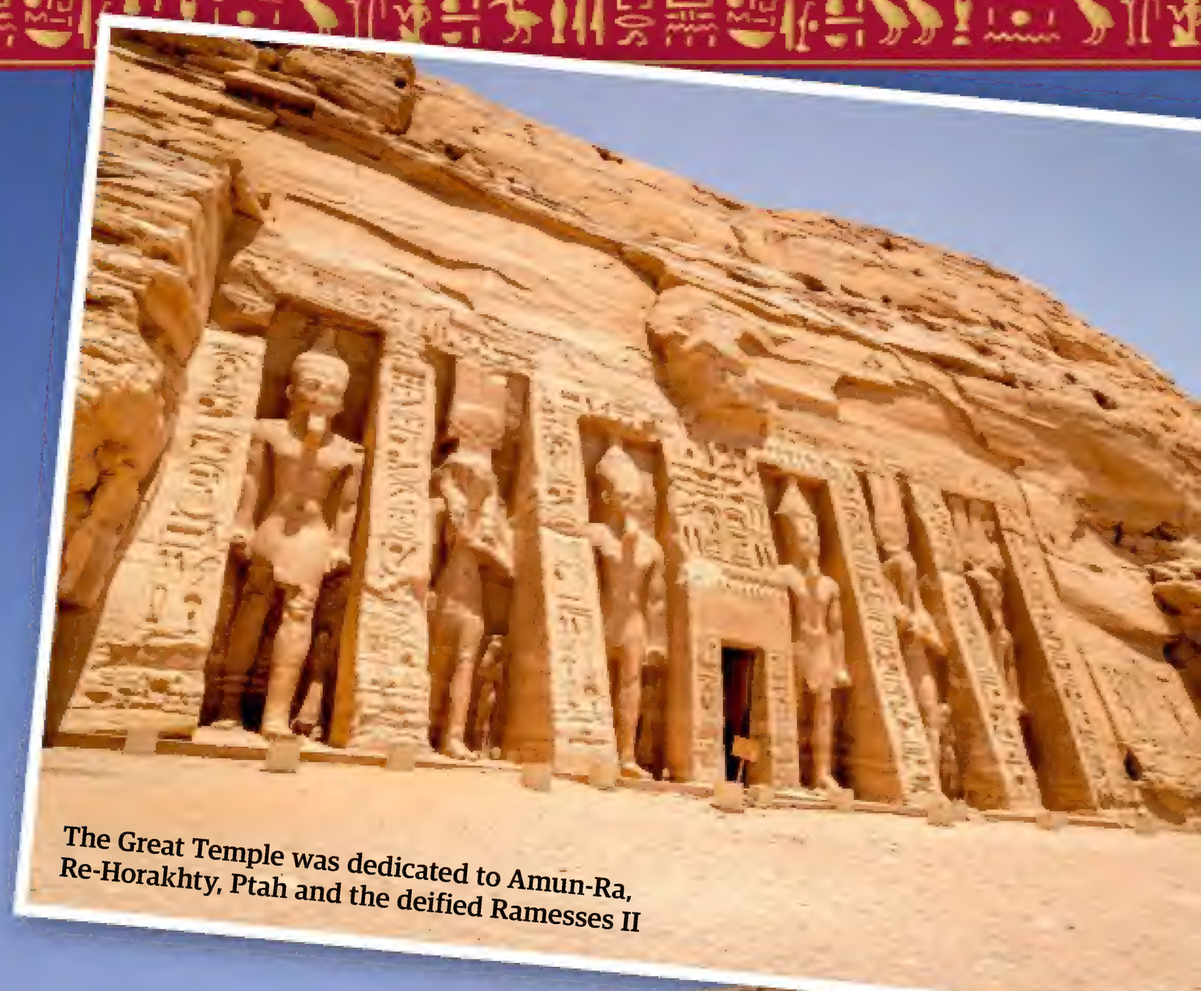
Abu Simbel

Abu Simbel comprises a pair of temples carved into the solid rock of the mountains on the west bank of the Nile. Probably built to celebrate Ramesses II's victory over the Hittites at the Battle of Kadesh, giant rock reliefs of the pharaoh and Queen Nefertari sit at the entrance of the temples – it's a rare instance of a consort's statue matching the size of a ruler's in Ancient Egypt.

The Great Temple, the larger of the two, took 20 years to complete. Inside, huge chambers were supported by pillars and decorated with images of the queen and the gods.

Commissioned by Ramesses II to commemorate his reign and to honour the sun gods Amun-Ra and Re-Horakhty, mergers of Amun and Horus with the god Ra, the chambers of the temples were aligned so that twice a year light would shine in and fall upon statues of the deities. The two dates on which the statues were illuminated were 22 February and 22 October – allegedly Ramesses' coronation date and his birthday, respectively.

Situated in an isolated location and covered in sand after falling out of use, the temples were lost for many centuries. They were rediscovered in 1813 by Jean-Louis Burckhardt, and explorers found an entrance to one of the chambers in 1817. By 1959 it had been decided that the temples should be moved as they were at risk of being destroyed by the rising Nile, and in 1964 work began on a four-year, $40 million project to dismantle Abu Simbel and reassemble it on higher ground 200 metres (656 feet) away from the river.



The Great Temple was dedicated to Amun-Ra, Re-Horakhty, Ptah and the deified Ramesses II

The colossal statues at the entrance to the Great Temple are 20m (66ft) tall

© Alamy, Getty Images

THE CURSE OF AMEN-RA

Was it an iceberg or an Egyptian mummy's curse that sank RMS Titanic?

Far from sinking with Titanic, the mummy board of Amen-Ra can be viewed in the British Museum

Words by Catherine Curzon

When RMS Titanic sank beneath the freezing waters of the Atlantic in the early hours of 15 April 1912, more than 1,500 people lost their lives. The doomed liner has become a legend, yet there are some who believe that her fate wasn't caused by an iceberg, but the vengeful mummy of Princess Amen-Ra. But just who was Amen-Ra, and how did she become a part of Titanic lore?

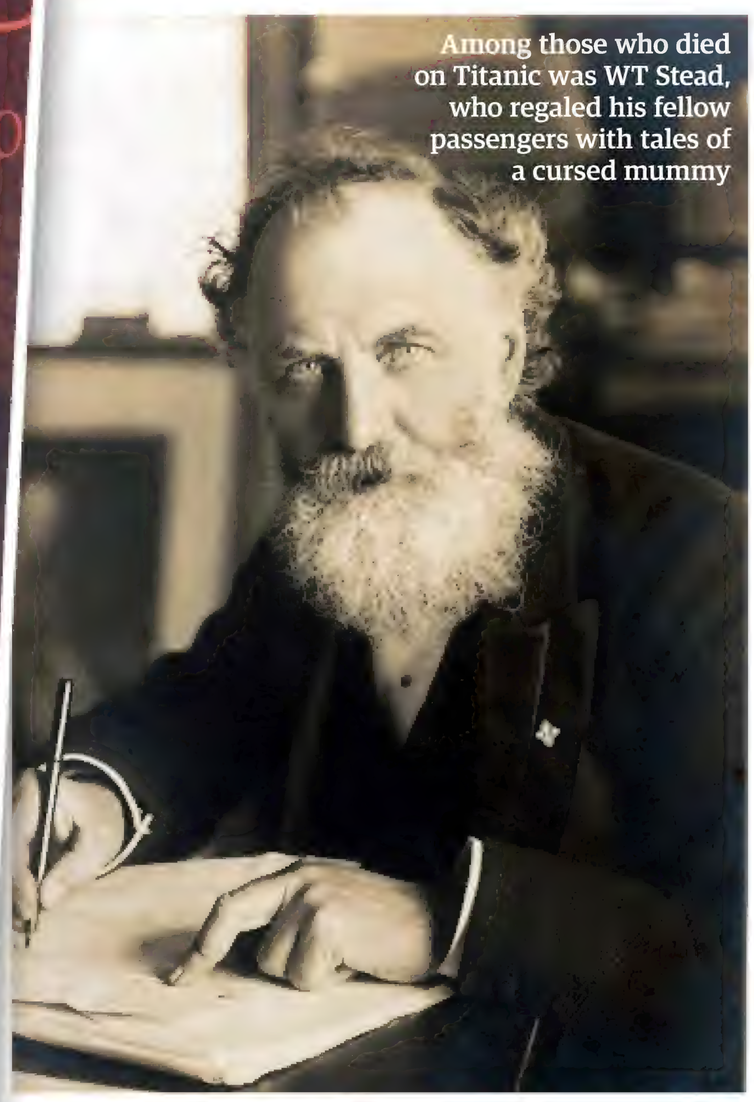
Supposedly, Princess Amen-Ra lived approximately 1,500 years before Christ and was laid to rest in Luxor, her mummified remains contained in a painted wooden casket. In the late-1880s, the casket and its contents were allegedly offered for sale to some English travellers, who drew lots to see who would make the purchase. The winner was Thomas Douglas Murray who, just hours after he took delivery of the casket, lost his arm in a shooting accident. Murray had the mummy sent back to London, and in the year that followed, several members of the Egyptian party lost their lives, Murray's fiancée left him and various tragedies befell photographers and journalists who encountered the mummy case. When famed psychic Madame Blavatsky declared that it was cursed, Murray donated the case and its contents to the British Museum on the advice of his friend, Arthur Wheeler.

As soon as the case arrived, museum employees began to suffer injury and even death, prompting *Daily Express* journalist Bertram Fletcher Robinson to make enquiries. He quickly fell ill and died, aged just 36. With the bodies stacking up, the British Museum supposedly secretly sold off the mummy, keeping only the painted 'mummy board'. Amen-Ra, so the legend has it, was bound for a private collection in New York aboard Titanic.

For more than 100 years, tales have been told of a mummy's curse that doomed RMS Titanic

This chilling story, however, isn't quite true. When the ship was lost, among those who died was William Thomas Stead, a famed newspaper editor, investigative reporter and committed spiritualist. Stead regaled his fellow passengers with spooky tales, and one of them was the story of the cursed mummy. Among his audience was Frederick Kimber Seward, a lawyer who survived the sinking. When he returned to New York, he shared reminiscences of Stead and the story of the mummy. As the stories were retold, a tale emerged in which Amen-Ra herself was in the hold and her curse afflicted the ship and all on board.

Amen-Ra fascinated the public, and her story was told as early as 1909 in sensationalist magazines


Among those who died on Titanic was WT Stead, who regaled his fellow passengers with tales of a cursed mummy

In fact, the truth is rather less dramatic. The board – there was no actual mummy – was owned by Mrs Warwick Hunt, Arthur Wheeler's sister, and it was through Wheeler that Murray first encountered it in 1890. Supposedly Mrs Hunt had suffered all sorts of misfortunes, and with tales of another mummy smashing up crockery in a suburban drawing room doing the rounds of the sensationalist press, she wondered if her own mummy board might be to blame. Wheeler showed the board to his friend, Murray, who in turn discussed it with his fellow Spiritualist, Stead.

Stead and Murray believed that the painted image on the board was that of a woman whose soul was in torment and must be freed. They recommended that the board be donated to the British Museum, but when they later asked the museum if they could conduct a séance, the request was turned down. Convinced that the mummy board was the cause of the Wheeler family misfortunes, they began to share the tale of the mummy's curse.

Decoration on mummy boards was executed with great care in red, blue and light and dark green

Thanks to Stead's respected journalistic credentials, their story took on weight, and he retold it in Titanic's smoking room.

In fact, when the mummy board was donated to the British Museum, there had been no mummy with it – it's likely that the remains were left behind in Egypt long ago. Titanic's cargo manifest recorded neither mummy nor casket in the hold, and when the ship sank, the mummy board was on public display at the British Museum, as it continues to be today. Yet the story wouldn't die, and eventually Sir Ernest Wallis Budge, the museum's keeper of Egyptian antiquities, issued a statement refuting tales of what had become known as 'the Unlucky Mummy'. The only evidence linking Amen-Ra to the ship is the story of Egyptian curses told by WT Stead. Stead may have gone down with the vessel, but his stories continued to spread.

Yet regardless of the facts in this tangled case, one thing is certain: the story of Amen-Ra's accursed grip on Titanic has endured, fascinating anyone who loves a good story. It will doubtless continue to do so, as timeless as so many other mysteries of Egypt.

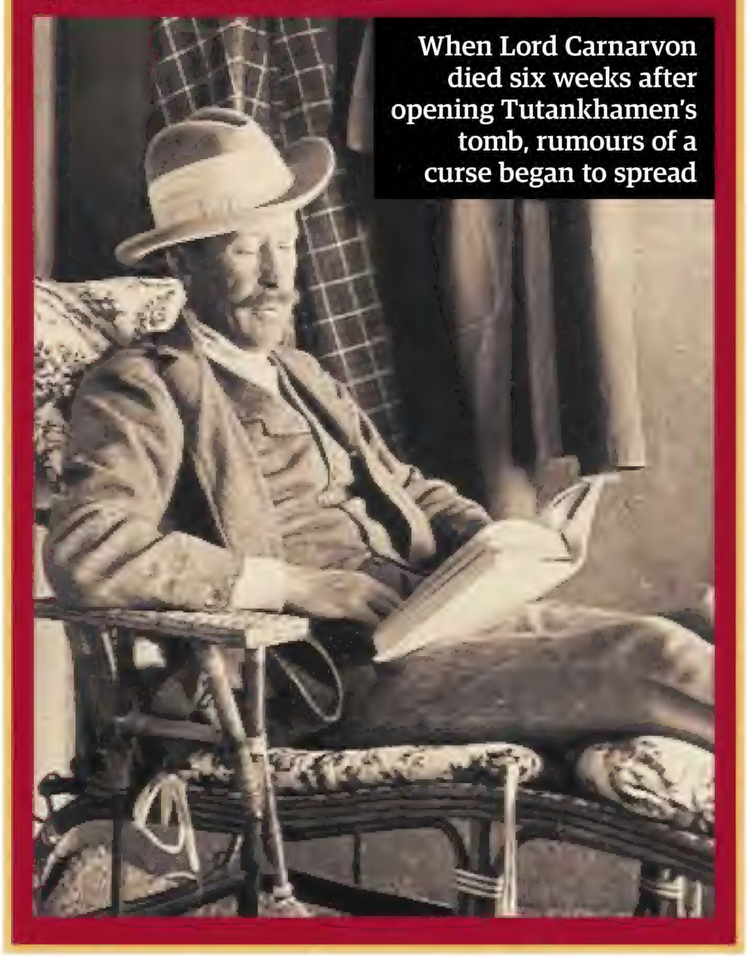
Other famous curses

The link between curses decorating tombs and superstition years later

The curse of Amen-Ra is just one of many associated with Ancient Egypt. The so-called curse of the pharaohs has become legendary, and history is littered with accounts of people who experienced misfortune after desecrating tombs. The most famous is probably Lord Carnarvon, who died after opening the tomb of Tutankhamen.

In fact, Lord Carnarvon was one of more than ten people with an interest in the tomb who died within a decade of it being opened. There were suicides, murders, illness and injuries, and with each of them the legend of the curse flourished. However, somewhat less famous are the many dozens more who were present at the opening of Tutankhamun's tomb who went on to live long lives. There wasn't even a curse inscribed on the tomb at all.

These inconvenient facts are often drowned out by the roll call of the late king's supposed victims, not to mention grisly stories of gunshot wounds and deathly fevers. After all, though more than 50 survivors far outlived those 11 who died, that doesn't make for quite such a dramatic story as the vengeance of a king, reaching from beyond the grave to claim his next unfortunate victim.


When Lord Carnarvon died six weeks after opening Tutankhamen's tomb, rumours of a curse began to spread

"Museum employees began to suffer injury and even death"

© Alamy, Getty Images

TUTANKHAMUN
CURSE OF THE BOY KING

The story of how a single discovery and one man's determination led an unknown boy king to become the symbol of Egyptology the world over

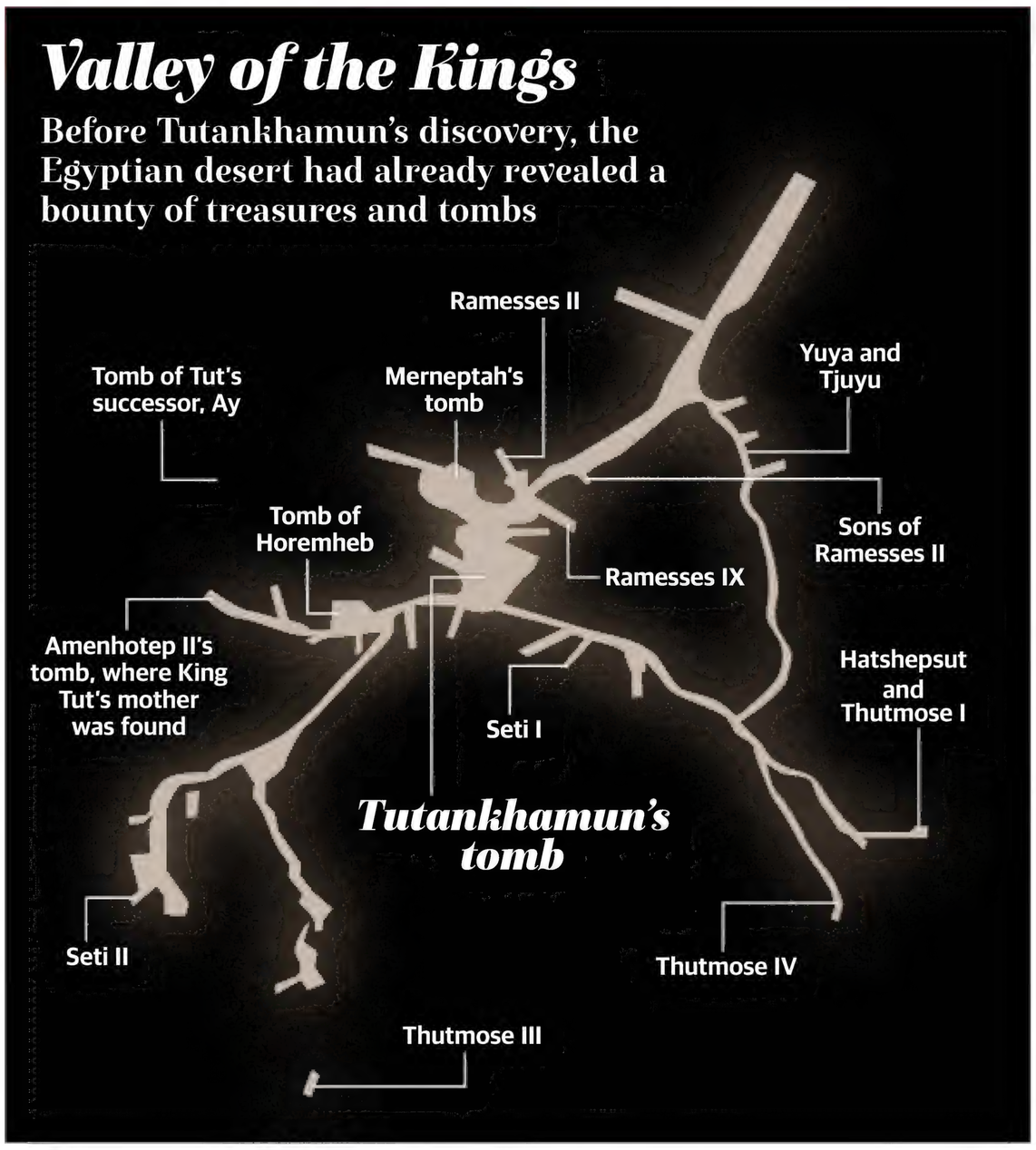
Words by Frances White

It had taken an eternity, at least it seemed, for the debris that lay in front of the large stone doorway to be removed. Lord Carnarvon had been pacing back and forth in the tiny passageway, while his daughter, Lady Evelyn, anxiously fiddled with her hair. But Howard Carter had stood still, watched, and waited. When the whole door was finally clear he moved toward it. As he reached forward with his chisel he discovered his hands were trembling. There was a quiet 'chink' as he chiselled away the plaster, opening the smallest of holes. Inserting a long iron rod confirmed that whatever lay beyond was, thank goodness, not filled with rubble, and candle tests proved there were no villainous gases lingering beyond. In silence he widened the hole a little, and when there was room he inserted a candle and peered inside. Darkness. His eyes struggled to adjust, the candle flickered as ancient hot air escaped the chamber through the tiny gap. But slowly the thick mist began to clear and details emerged. He saw strange shapes in the flickering haze, peculiar animals he had never seen before, towering statues and gold, gold was everywhere, glinting through the darkness.

"Can you see anything?" Carnarvon's voice alarmed him; Carter had forgotten that anyone else was there at all. His mouth was dry, his tongue heavy and with all the effort he could muster he managed three words:

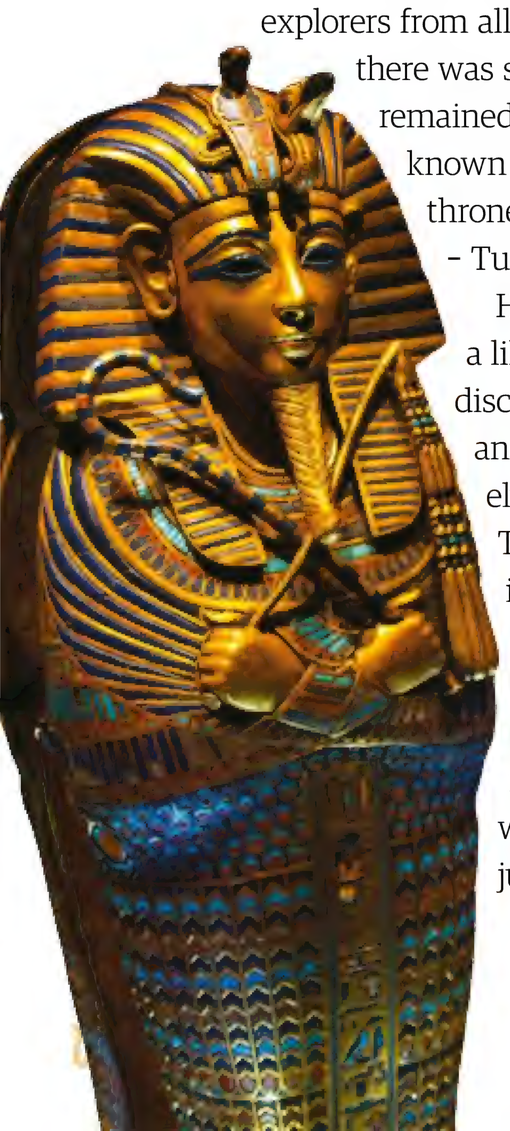
"Yes, wonderful things."

From Alexander to Caesar to Hadrian, Egypt and its ancient mysteries has been a source of fascination and intrigue for some of the greatest figures in human history. However, it was Napoleon, following the lead of his heroes, who truly unleashed the era of scientific Egyptology upon the world. When Napoleon set sail to the Orient on 19 May 1789 with his 17,000 troops and machines of war, he also brought over 150



George Herbert, Earl of Carnarvon (right), was one of the era's most famous Egyptologists

engineers, scientists, scholars, architects, surveyors and cartographers who were eager to map and study the wonders they could unearth. With free rein to explore, it was not long before Napoleon's adventurers were discovering new tombs in the Valley of the Kings, so named for the abundance of pharaohs who chose it as their final resting place. A thirst for the wonders of Ancient Egypt swept through Napoleon's army, and even the ambitious young general himself began to catch the fever. Over the next century, dozens of tombs, chambers and caches were unearthed by archaeologists and explorers from all over the world. But there was still one tomb that remained hidden: that of a little-known boy king who sat on the throne for less than ten years – Tutankhamun.



Howard Carter was not a likely candidate for the discovery of this vault of ancient treasure that had eluded so many others. The son of an artist, his introduction to Egyptian history came as a result of his own artistic abilities and lack of formal schooling. He was first employed, aged just 17, to copy scenes from tomb walls. He accompanied skilled excavator Flinders Petrie as the latter began to uncover clues about the mysterious Pharaoh Tutankhamun. The young Carter had no idea who this king was, but he felt the buzz surrounding him, and the rumour that somewhere in the vast desert of sand lay his tomb, untouched and bursting full of precious ancient treasures, alighted his boyish curiosity.

Although he quickly rose through the ranks, Carter's fiery and stubborn personality got the better of him when he refused to apologise after encouraging Egyptian guards to defend themselves against French tourists who had assaulted them. He left the Antiquities Service for good and became a free agent. Meanwhile, Theodore M Davis, a private sponsor of the Antiquities Service, and his team had made a curious discovery in the Valley of the Kings. What they had unearthed was a small site with a few artefacts bearing Tutankhamun's name. The discovery was underwhelming, but Davis was convinced he had discovered the plundered tomb of the king. In his publication, concerning the discovery he wrote, "I fear the Valley of the Kings is now exhausted."

Carter did not agree. Now unemployed and scraping a living by selling his paintings to wealthy visitors, he hardly had the funds required to pursue his suspicions that Davis' discovery was not the true tomb. But he was in luck. The lure of Egypt and its many secrets had drawn in the wealthy but frail George Herbert, Fifth Earl of Carnarvon. Both men were eager to make a spectacular discovery, and both men needed the other's skills and resources to do it. In 1909 they became a team, and when Davis gave up the concession to excavate in the Valley of the Kings in 1914, Carter and Carnarvon leapt at the chance. However, their peers viewed the pair as idealistic and naive, warning them that the only thing that would be discovered in their search would likely be the bottom of the Earl's wallet.

Having ascended to the throne at only nine years of age, the mummy reveals that the boy king ruled for only ten years, dying at 19

Undeterred, Carter set about searching for the tomb he thoroughly believed existed. Initially interrupted by World War I, Carter was finally free to continue the excavations in 1917, working his way from the surface down to the bedrock of the valley floor. It was long, exhausting work, and it was estimated Carter's team moved 150,000 to 200,000 tons of rubble in the relentless Egyptian sun. But six seasons of digging later and they had still found nothing. Carnarvon was beginning to believe the critics were right.

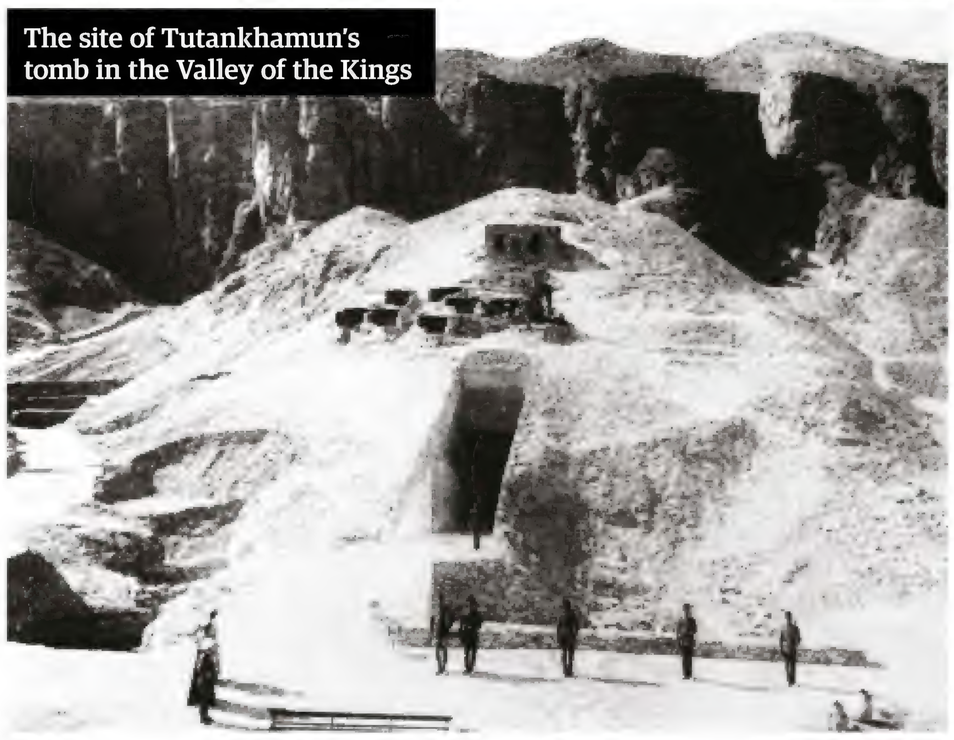
Although Carter was meticulous with his careful treatment of the treasures of the tomb, he showed less concern for the mummy itself

Although initially dazzled by the promises of Egypt and by Carter with his bounding enthusiasm, he had watched the money he had poured into the adventure trickle away with no reward, and he was growing impatient.

Carter managed to persuade his friend and Carnarvon granted him one final season. If he didn't find anything it would be the end of the money, and the end of the search for Tutankhamun's tomb. Extreme times called for extreme measures, and Carter focused his efforts on the previously untouched area of ancient workman's huts beneath the entrance to the tomb of Ramesses VI. It had been left untouched because digging there would cause disturbance to the stream of tourists eager to visit the tomb. On 1 November 1922 they began to clear away the rubble and, just three days later, they found a step carved into the rock. Carter and his team followed the steps down and discovered a blocked and plastered doorway with a curious seal upon it. On 6 November Carter sent a telegram to his patron: "At last have made wonderful discovery in Valley a magnificent tomb with seals intact recovered same for your arrival congratulations."

Carter faced what was probably the longest wait of his life. As he awaited the arrival of Carnarvon he pondered what he could have possibly discovered. A man now bitterly accustomed to disappointment, he only allowed himself to conclude that perhaps he had found a dynasty cache. Even when

The site of Tutankhamun's tomb in the Valley of the Kings



Digging for a king

Getting funding
Howard Carter convinces Lord Carnarvon to finance a search for the tomb. He begins digging in the Valley of the Kings, but by 1922 Carnarvon permits just one more season of funding.
1917-1922

A step in the right direction
While Howard Carter is temporarily away from the dig site, a step is found carved into the bedrock.
4 November 1922

A royal discovery
Carter discovers the sealed door of the tomb and sees a passage behind. He then sends a telegram to Carnarvon to alert him.
5 November 1922

Wonderful things
Through a tiny hole he glimpses what he describes as a "strange and wonderful medley of extraordinary and beautiful objects."
26 November 1922

Exploration
Carter, Carnarvon and Lady Evelyn notice a sealed doorway and secretly reopen an ancient robber's hole to crawl inside.
27 November 1922

The burial chamber
Carter opens the sealed doorway to the burial chamber and sarcophagus of the pharaoh. It is officially opened the next day.
16 February 1923

The curse begins
Lord Carnarvon dies after a mosquito bite becomes infected. Carter begins liaising with the authorities and press.
5 April 1923

At breaking point
After interference by the authorities, Carter locks the tomb and refuses to return the keys to the French director of Antiquities.
12 February 1924

The long-awaited return
Lady Carnarvon agrees to renounce her claims to the tomb and Carter returns to work. The tomb is opened officially.
25 January 1925

Mission complete
Conservation work on the tomb is finally completed and the treasures are sent to Cairo Museum.
1932

Inside the tomb

Step inside the various rooms and vaults that were found to be contained within the boy king's tomb

01 Staircase
16 steps descend through bedrock toward a doorway. This doorway was sealed and plastered but showed signs that it had been penetrated by ancient gravediggers at least twice.

02 Entrance corridor
This corridor has a steady descent and was originally filled with limestone chips and rubble to prevent grave robbers. There is a second plaster door at the end, stamped with King Tutankhamun's royal seal. This door too shows signs of having been opened.

03 Antechamber
This chamber was found in a state of organised chaos, packed full of an array of precious items including King Tut's throne, two life-sized statues of the king and a selection of chariots. The walls are unusually rough and undecorated, adding to the idea that it was a speedy, unexpected burial.

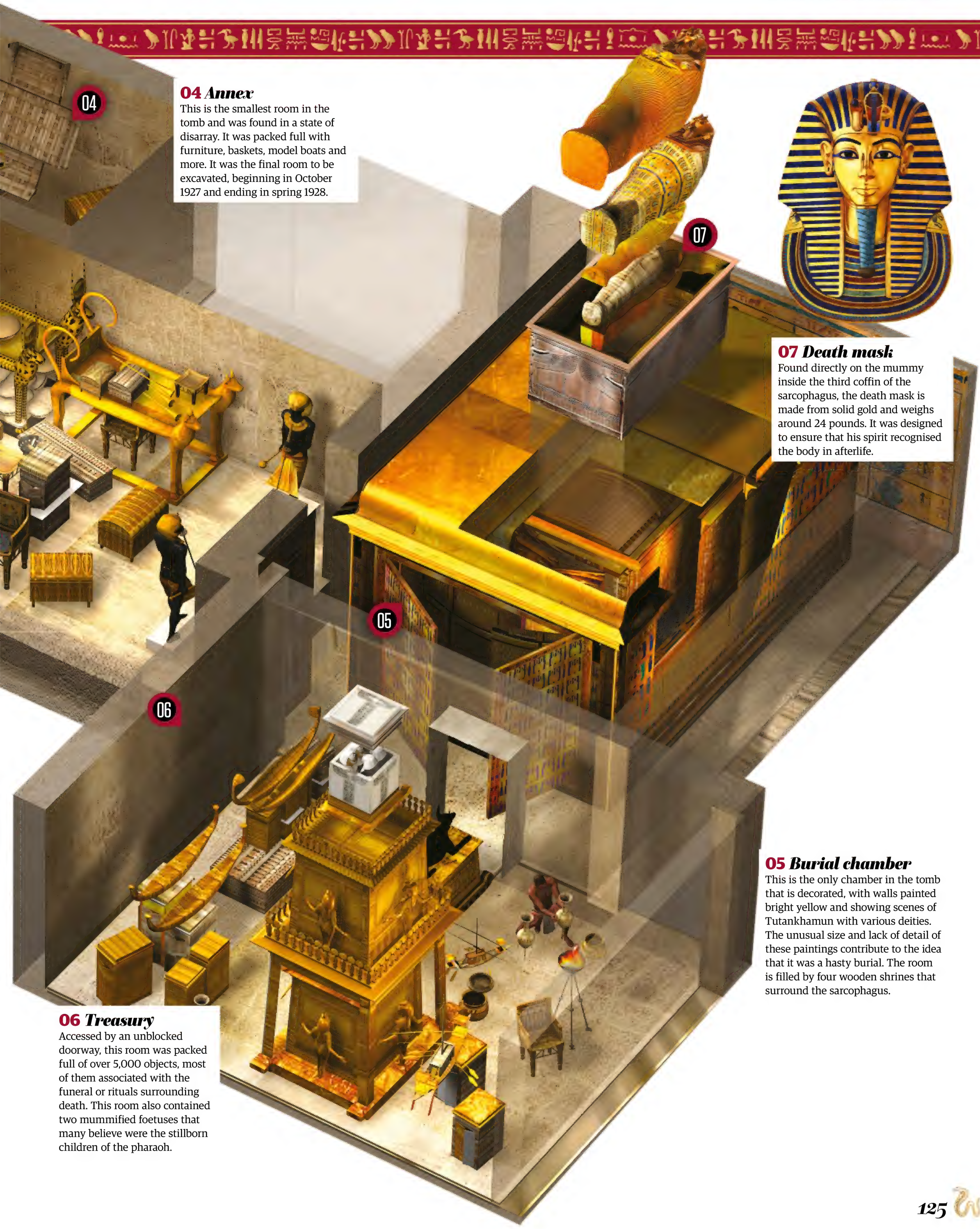
"He had been right all along; they had found the tomb of the elusive pharaoh"

the doorway was fully exposed and the name 'Tutankhamun' could be read, he reasoned that it was he or his officials who had sealed the chamber, and besides, he could see that the tomb had been tampered with by ancient robbers – it could well be empty. It was not until that fateful day, as he stood peering into the chamber by flickering candlelight that he fully understood the magnitude of his discovery – he had been right all along; it was the tomb of the elusive pharaoh.

When the doorway was finally opened it revealed exactly what Carter had described: wonderful things. The newly dubbed antechamber was packed full of an array of treasures, beautiful golden chests, grand chariots, beds carved in the shapes of animals and an abundance of other precious objects. However, Carter quickly noticed there was no coffin. But there were promising sealed doorways on the western and northern walls. For both Carter and Carnarvon the lure of the northern wall, guarded by two statues of the king himself, was too much to resist. Without alerting the Antiquities Service, the two men and Lady Evelyn embarked on a secret nighttime adventure into the burial chamber.

Although their curiosity had been sated, the raiders were keen to hide all evidence of their illegal exploration. They reblocked the hole they had crawled through, and even hid the modern plaster behind a suspiciously placed basket lid. It was a terribly kept secret, and their nocturnal adventure was immediately obvious to all who inspected the tomb. Luckily, with everyone swept up in the excitement of the discovery, there were no further enquiries about the strangely modern plasterwork on the ancient tomb.

On 29 November the press had gathered for the official opening of the tomb and locals had already started to sell Tutankhamun-themed Christmas cards from makeshift tables set up in the vast sandy expanse of the valley. Although eager to discover what lay within the burial chamber, Carter was dedicated to meticulously clearing and documenting every single item discovered in the antechamber and annex, and of course, he was already very aware of what lay beyond the northern door, for he had already seen it. It took two and a half months to complete the mammoth task. It



04 Annex

This is the smallest room in the tomb and was found in a state of disarray. It was packed full with furniture, baskets, model boats and more. It was the final room to be excavated, beginning in October 1927 and ending in spring 1928.

07 Death mask

Found directly on the mummy inside the third coffin of the sarcophagus, the death mask is made from solid gold and weighs around 24 pounds. It was designed to ensure that his spirit recognised the body in afterlife.

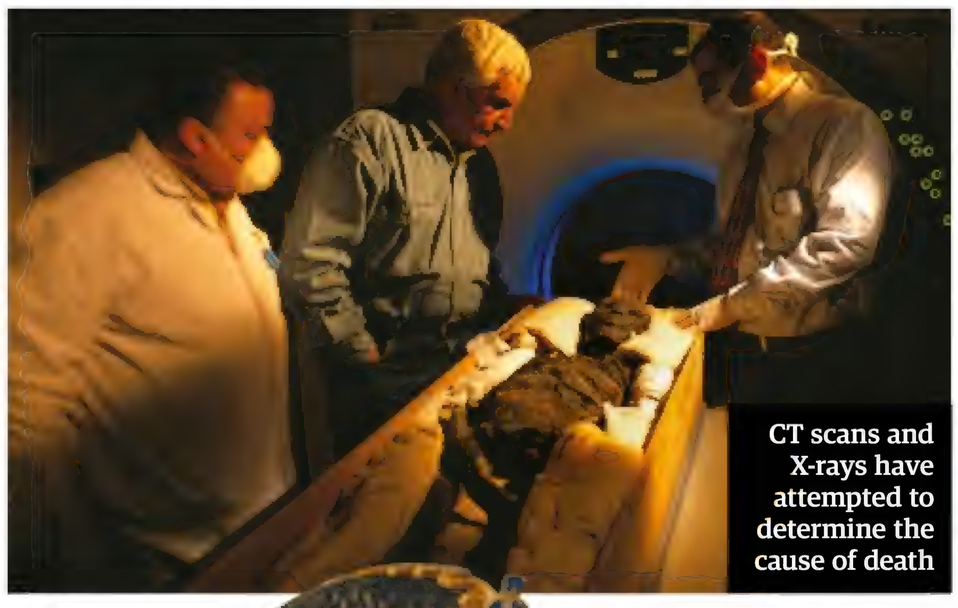
05 Burial chamber

This is the only chamber in the tomb that is decorated, with walls painted bright yellow and showing scenes of Tutankhamun with various deities. The unusual size and lack of detail of these paintings contribute to the idea that it was a hasty burial. The room is filled by four wooden shrines that surround the sarcophagus.

06 Treasury

Accessed by an unblocked doorway, this room was packed full of over 5,000 objects, most of them associated with the funeral or rituals surrounding death. This room also contained two mummified foetuses that many believe were the stillborn children of the pharaoh.

Lord Carnarvon and Howard Carter after the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb



CT scans and X-rays have attempted to determine the cause of death

What killed King Tut?

He was murdered by his successor

The presence of a piece of bone in his skull cavity led experts to believe that Tutankhamun died from a brain haemorrhage caused by a blow to the head. Recent examination has discredited this theory.

Malaria

A DNA analysis showed malaria to be present in Tutankhamun's system, leading some to believe his weakened body was unable to fight it off. Although this can be a deadly disease, adults often develop immunity to it, so this theory is in some doubt.

A chariot crash

Tutankhamun's body had several injuries down one side. Car-crash experts concluded that the injuries would correspond to death by a chariot crash, which shattered his ribs and pelvis. However, it was later concluded that these injuries occurred after death.

Genetic diseases

A host of genetic diseases are attributed to Tutankhamun's death, including temporal lobe epilepsy. Experts hypothesised that this epilepsy caused a fatal fall that broke his leg, which then became infected.

Killed by a hippo

The fact that Tutankhamun had several broken ribs and that his heart was not embalmed made a case for a injury to the chest as the cause of death. As hunting hippos was a pastime of Egyptian pharaohs, it gave birth to this seemingly outrageous theory.

An artist's impression of the boy king

was a nerve-wracking experience for Carter and his team, as they risked the ancient – and very delicate – artefacts crumbling to dust at their touch. Every single chest they uncovered had to undergo a mini excavation of the seemingly random jumble of ancient items that had been hastily stuffed inside.

When it was finally time to officially open the burial chamber, Carnarvon gave a speech where he, as his brother described, was unusually nervous, "like a naughty schoolboy", quite obviously anxious that their nighttime raid may be discovered. Regardless, Carter breached the doorway and they were able to squeeze through three at a time. The sight that greeted them was astonishing – a great gilt shrine 2.7 metres (nine feet) high filled almost the entire chamber. It was completely overlaid with gold and undoubtedly housed the coffin of the king. Beyond what was now obviously the burial chamber, they uncovered yet another room packed with gleaming objects. The tomb seemed to hold treasure upon treasure upon treasure. It was a discovery of the sort that had never been seen before and was unlikely to happen again.

It did not take long for the British press to become consumed by this colossal discovery.

The excavation of Tutankhamun's tomb was a massive undertaking

Victims of 'the curse'

It wasn't just Carnarvon who supposedly succumbed to the pharaoh's curse...

Aubrey Herbert
Carnarvon's half-brother
Date of death: 26 September 1923
Cause: Blood poisoning

George Jay Gould I
Visitor to the tomb
Date of death: 16 May 1923
Cause: Fever

Sir Achibald Douglas-Reid
X-rayed Tutankhamun's mummy
Date of death: 15 January 1924
Cause: Unknown illness

Prince Ali Kamel Fahmy Bey
Prince of Egypt
Date of death: 10 July 1923
Cause: Shot by his wife

Arthur Cruttenden Mace
Part of excavation team
Date of death: 1928
Cause: Arsenic poisoning

Richard Bethell
Carter's secretary
Date of death: 15 November 1929
Cause: Smothered in bed

News of the ancient treasures spread like wildfire and soon dignitaries and royalty from all over the world descended on the tomb, each one hoping for a private viewing. Anyone with even the slightest connection to any member of the team attempted to exploit it, but the general public and journalists had to make do with watching from beyond the tomb's perimeter wall. However, this position in itself provided a kind of spectacle, as the crowds watched eagerly as an array of mysterious items were removed from the tomb. Every day more and more tourists poured into Luxor, and hotels even set up tents in their gardens to accommodate the unprecedented demand.

On 5 April 1923 disaster struck – Carnarvon was dead. The source of his passing was an infected mosquito bite he had nicked with his razor, but to the public and press who had become so enthralled with the dark mysteries of Ancient Egypt there was only one explanation – the tomb was cursed. An array of 'experts' came forward, claiming in the tabloids that the Earl's death was certainly linked to his penetration and plundering of the solemn resting place of an ancient and powerful king. Numerous stories of dark and mysterious events added fuel to the gossip fire – such as Carter's yellow canary being killed by a cobra after the discovery of the tomb, and all the lights in Cairo going out the moment Carnarvon shuffled off his mortal coil. There were tales of an ancient script written above the entrance of the tomb: "Death comes on swift wings to him that toucheth the tomb of the Pharaoh", and to a gripped public, this curse of the mummy was becoming a reality.

The true – and rather more mundane – facts of the situation were, of course, ignored. Carnarvon was already ill and frail and had reached the average life expectancy of 57 at the time of his death. Cairo's electricity supply was notoriously unreliable, and no such message of ancient horrors existed. But for the press who were struggling to keep the public entertained by the slow moving events of the tomb, the human tragedy was gold. A close eye was kept on anyone vaguely associated with the excavation, and the press quickly published details of their untimely and shocking deaths. For Carter enough was enough. Time and time again he denied the existence of the curse, and said instead that "there was probably no place in the world freer from risks than the Tomb." But the public were having none of it; as far as they were concerned, the curse was very much real.

It is estimated that around 3,500 items were discovered within the fabulous tomb of Tutankhamun

Although the legend of a curse was obviously not the ideal result, Carter, with his bounding fascination for all things Egyptian, probably would have been delighted by the mania for Egypt that spread across the world after his discovery. Carter's treasures remained in the Cairo Museum until the Sixties when they travelled all around the world. In the most popular exhibition in its history at the British Museum, over 1.6 million people queued for over eight hours to glimpse the ancient wonders of the boy king's tomb. Importantly, if it weren't for the determination and self-belief of one man, they may still lie buried today.

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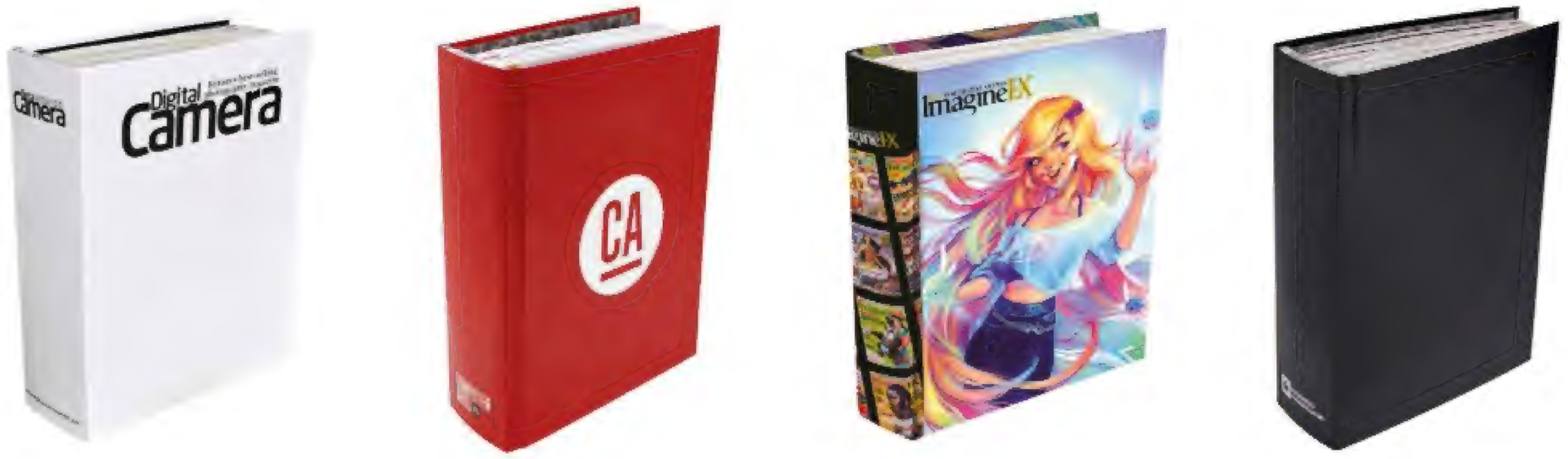

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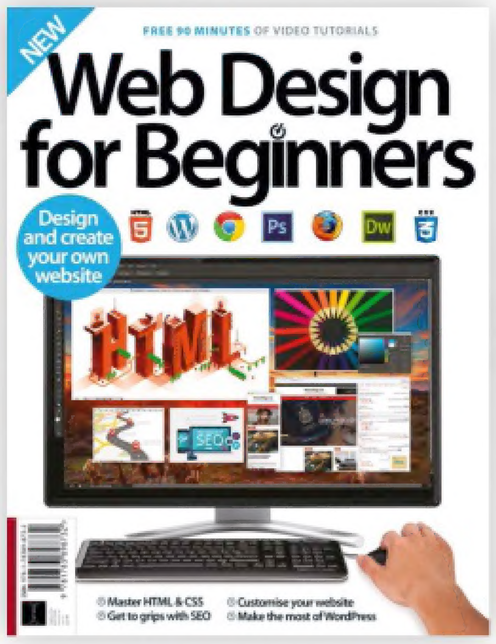

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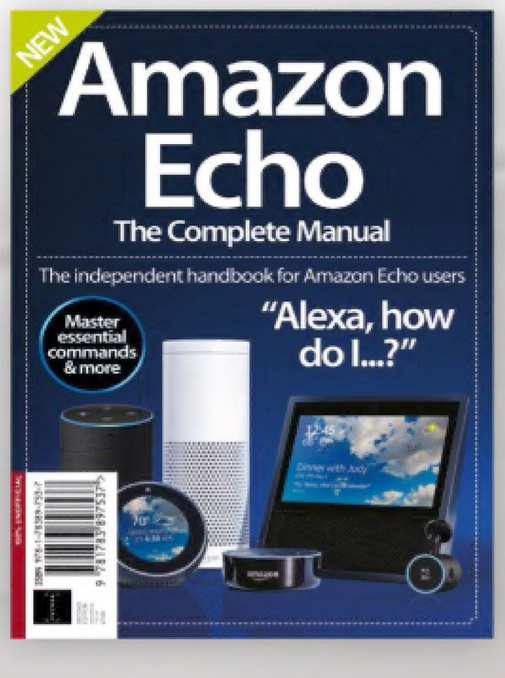

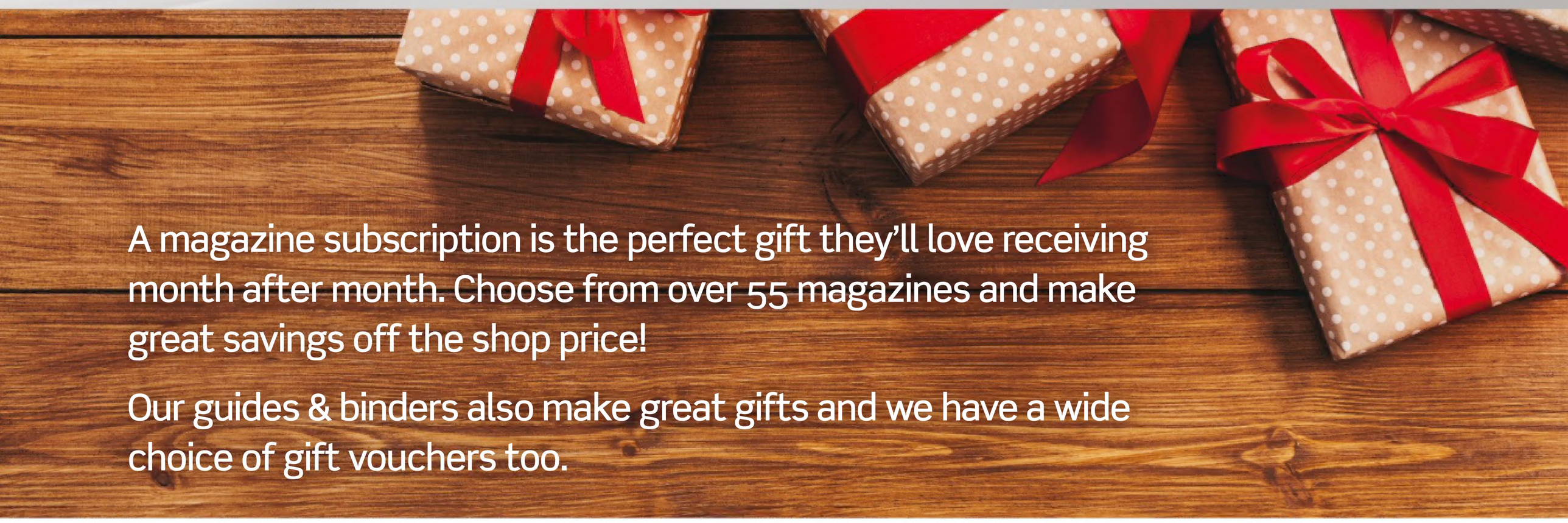

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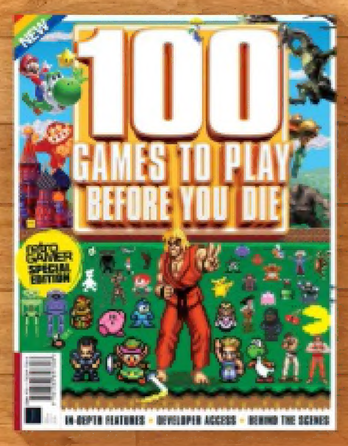

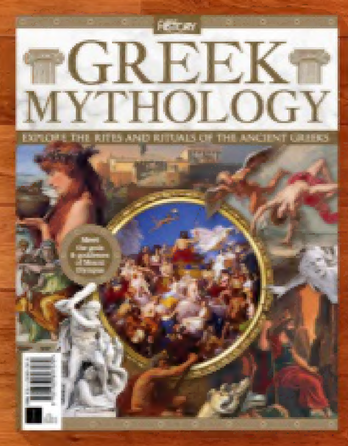

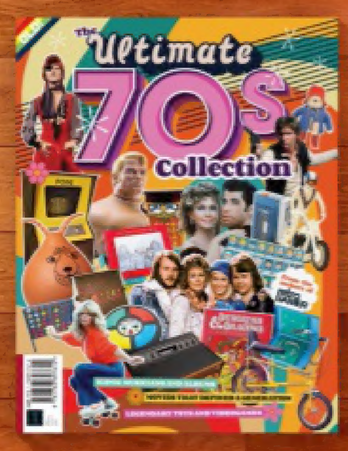

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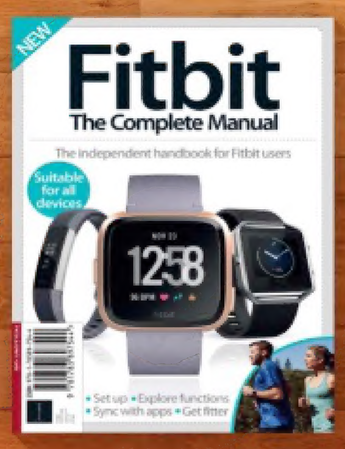

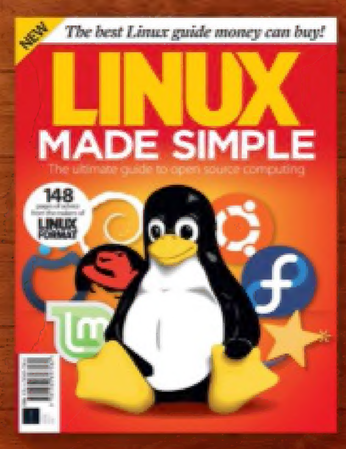

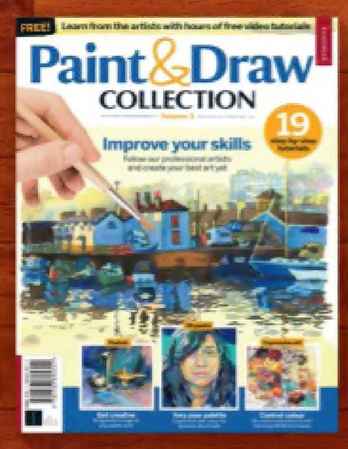

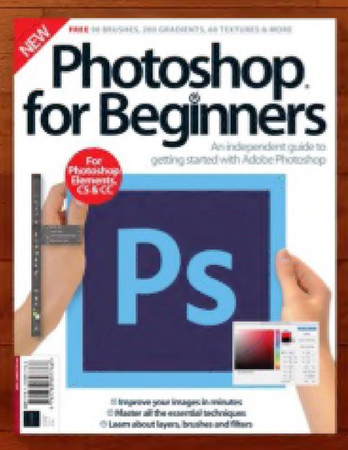

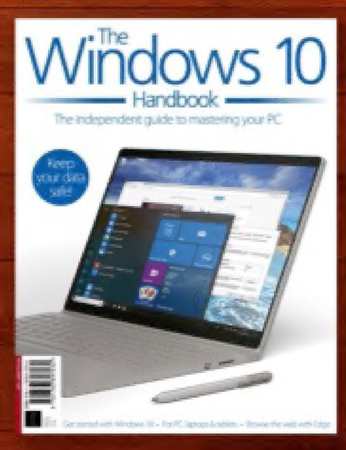

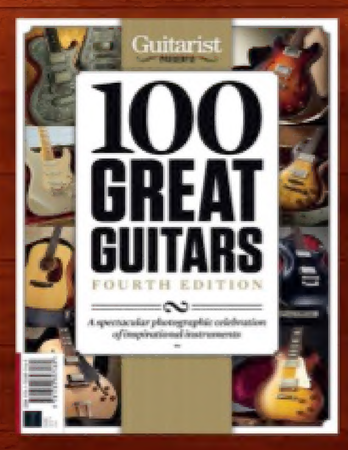

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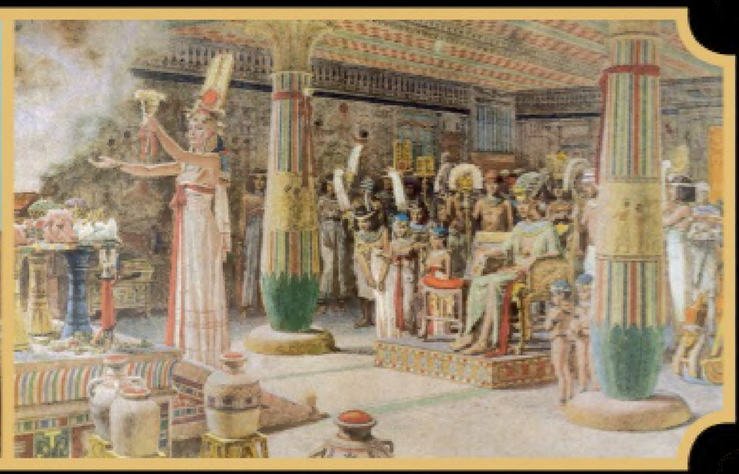

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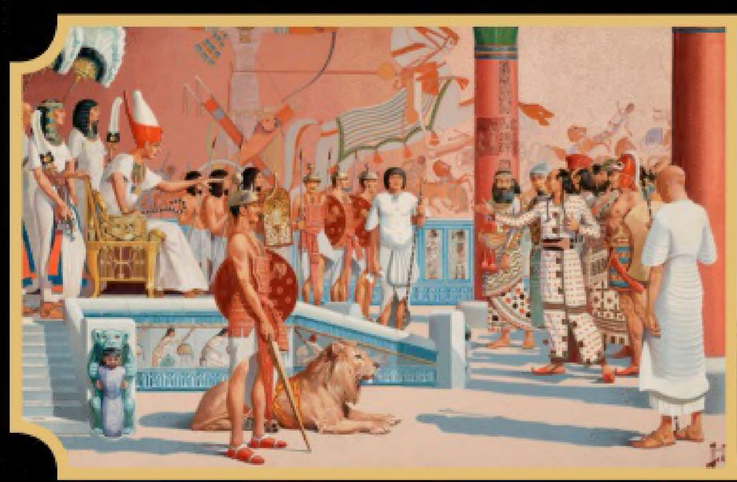

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